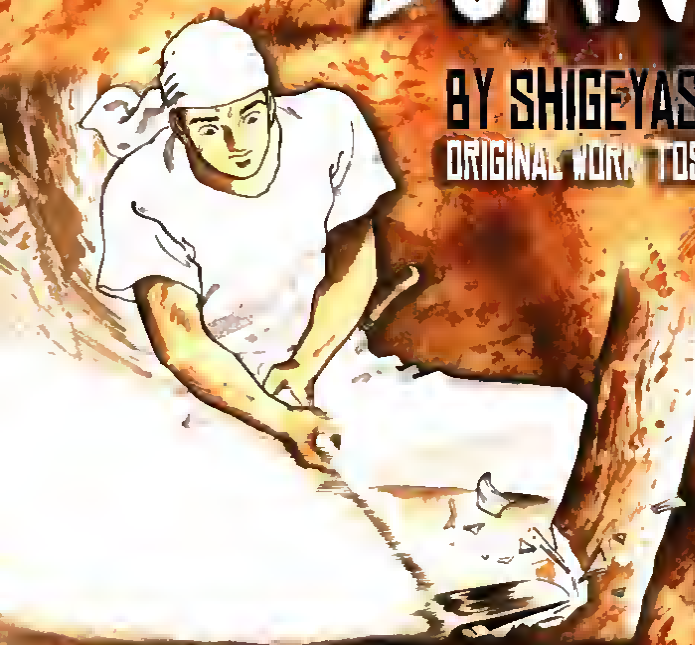
TALES OF A CHARCOAL BURNER

BY SHIGEYASU TAKENO

ORIGINAL WORK: TOSHIKATSU UE



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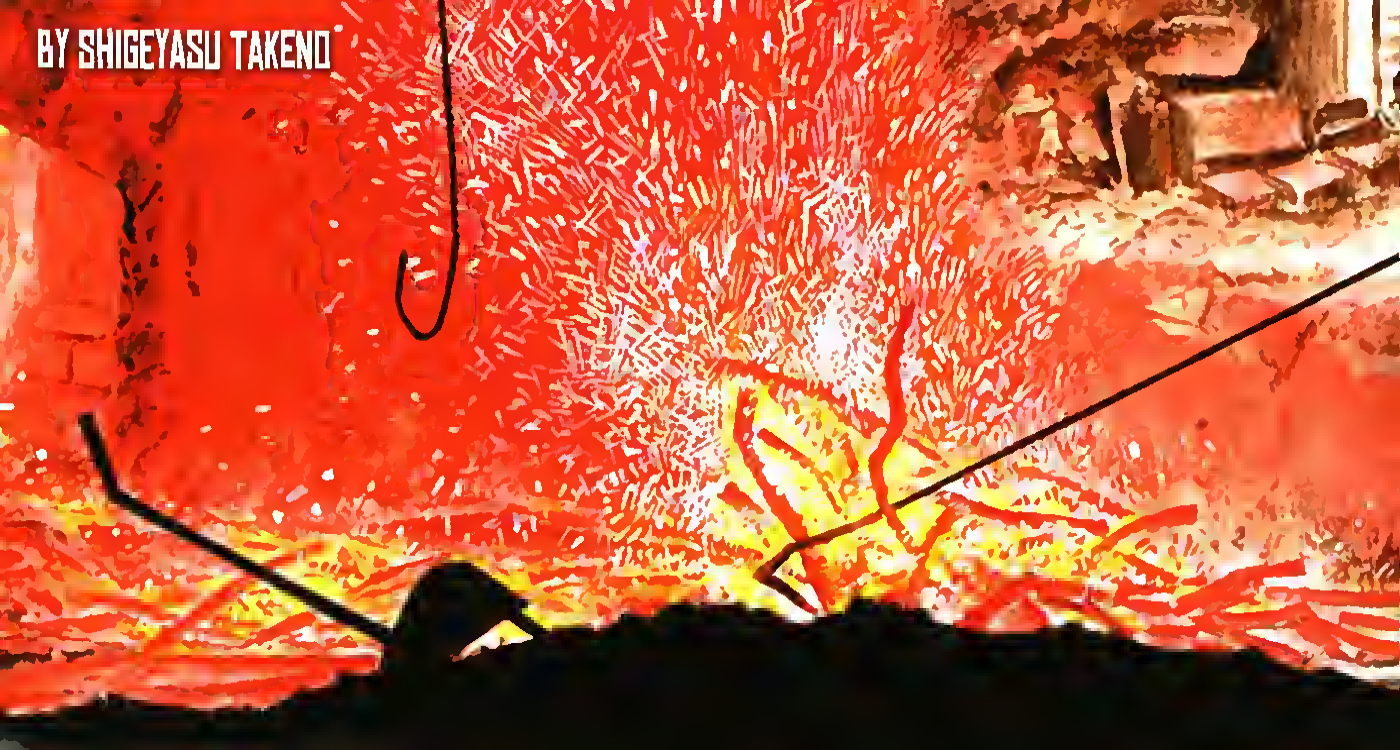
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TALES OF A CHARCOAL BURNER

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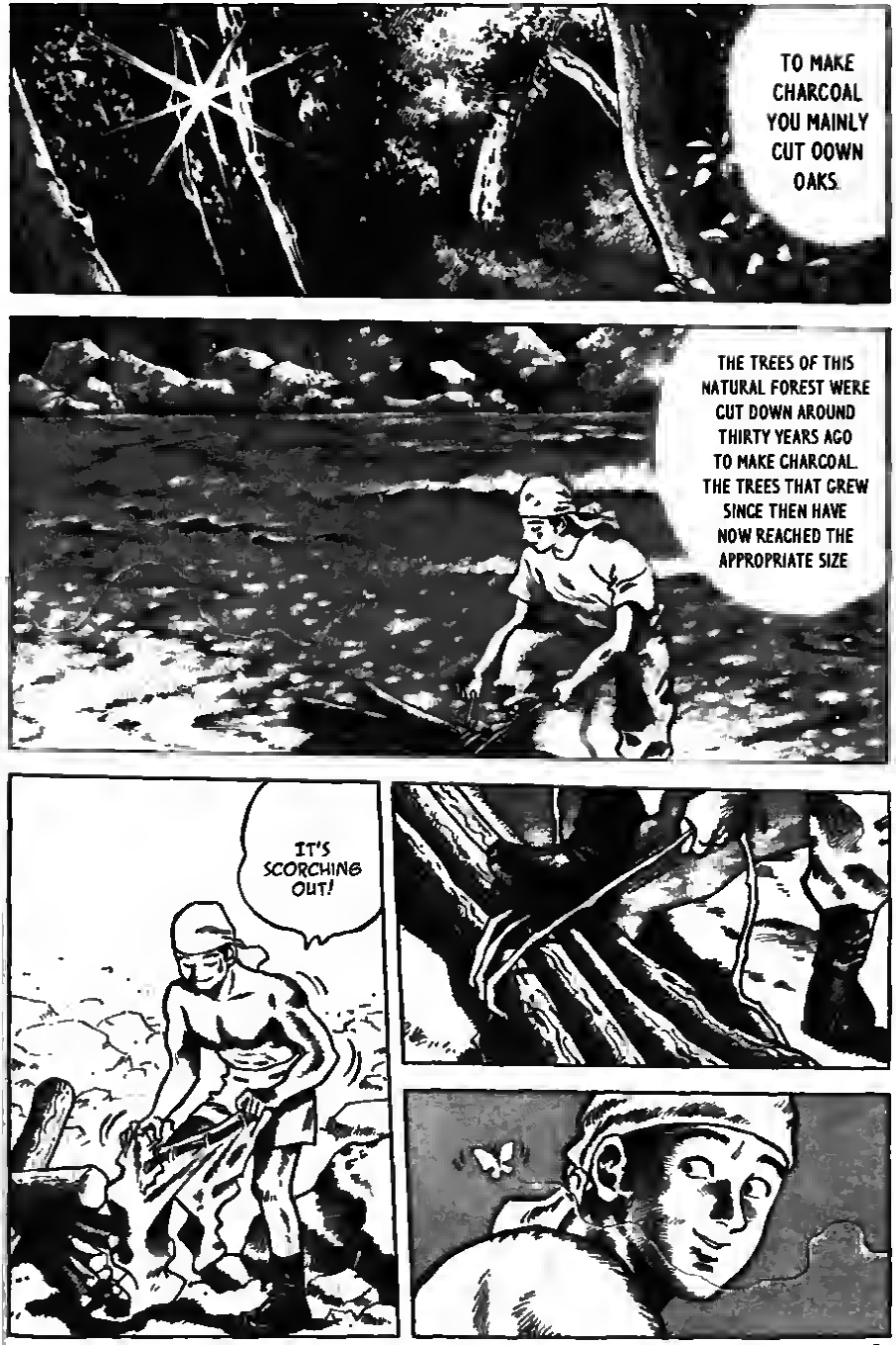
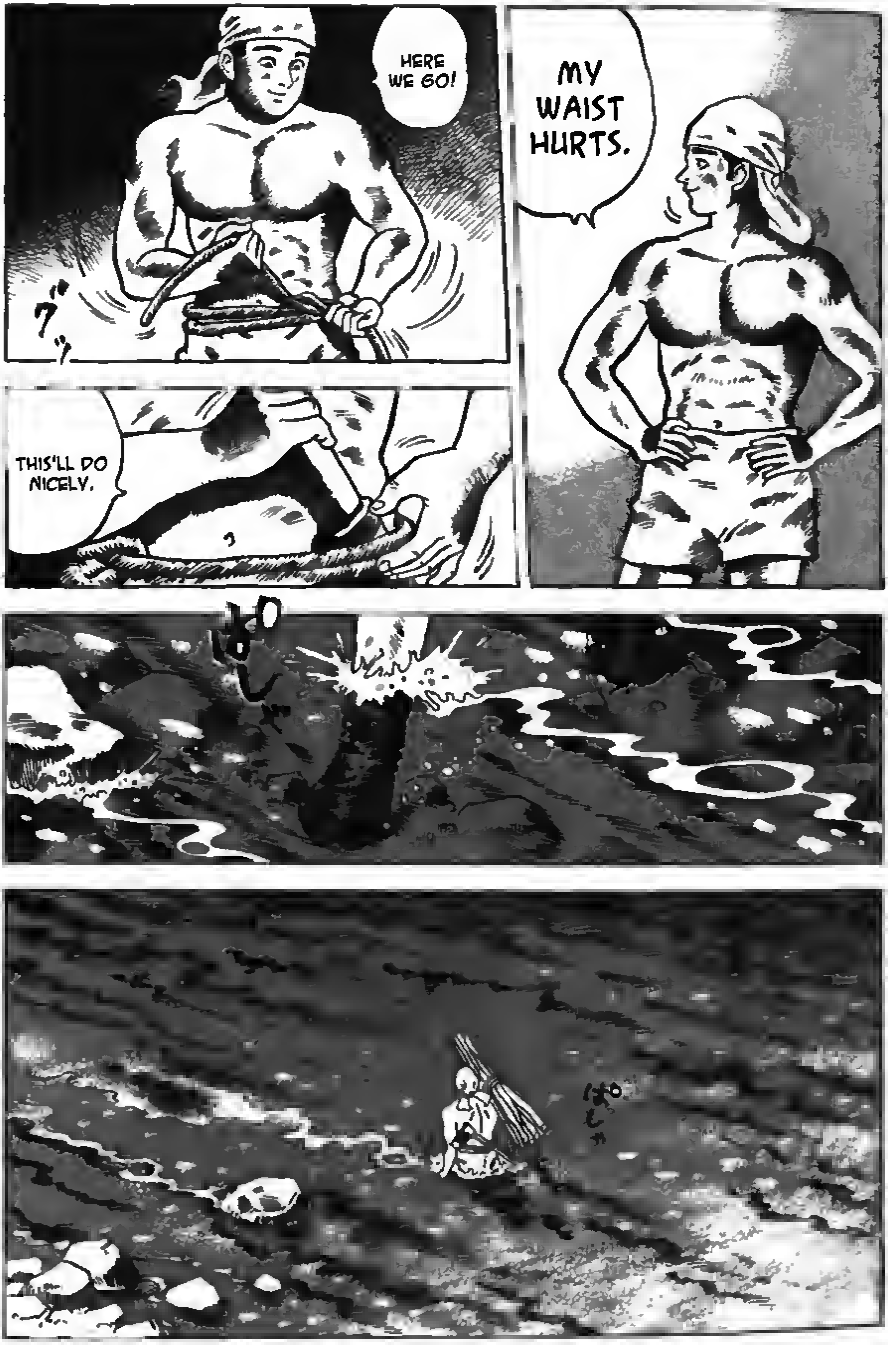
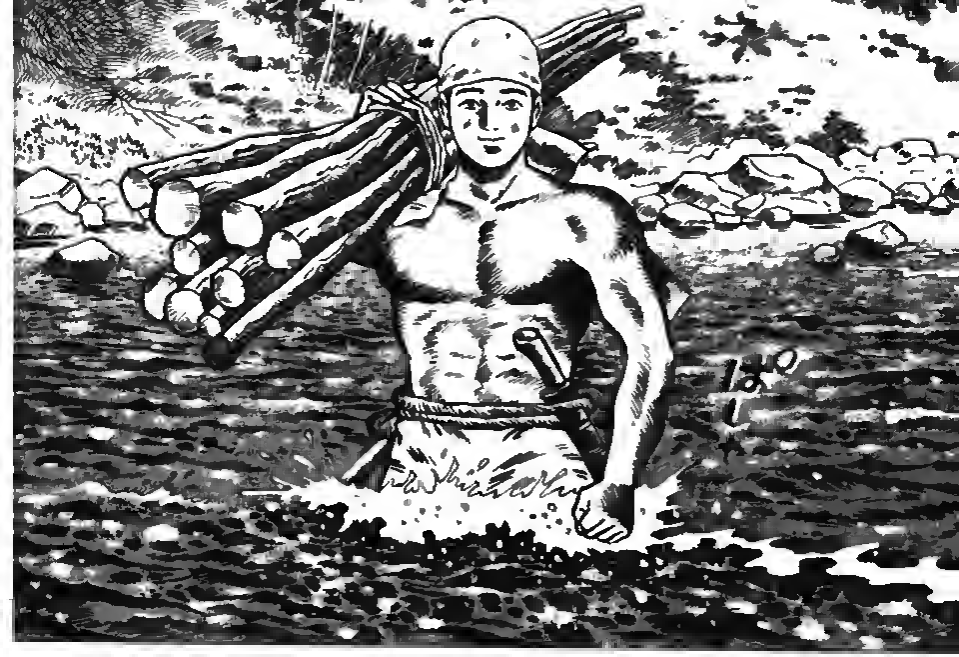
Chapter 1:
Chopping Trees

NISHI NO TANI, IN THE RURAL NISHIMURO DISTRICT, WAKAYAMA PREFECTURE, 1957.

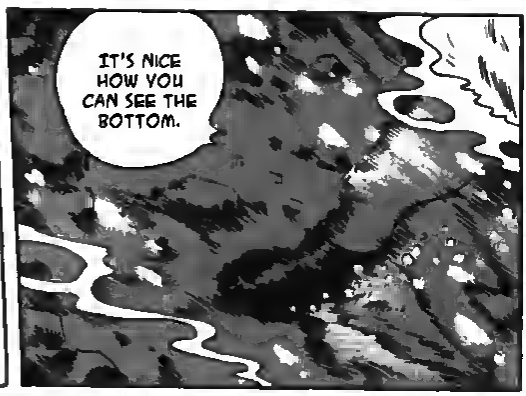
NISHI NO TANI IS A STREAM BARELY THREE KILOMETERS LONG, WHICH FLOWS FROM THE VILLAGE OF NAKAHECHI TO THE MAIN COURSE OF THE HIKIGAWA RIVER.
ALTHOUGH TODAY IT'S A FOREST OF CEDARS AND JAPANESE CYPRESS, IN 1957 THERE WAS STILL A LARGE VARIETY OF TREES.
ばしゃ
SOME TEN FAMILIES OF CHARCOAL BURNERS WERE WORKING IN THEIR RESPECTIVE CABINS AND KILNS.


TO MAKE CHARCOAL YOU MAINLY CUT DOWN OAKS.
THE TREES OF THIS NATURAL FOREST WERE CUT DOWN AROUND THIRTY YEARS AGO TO MAKE CHARCOAL. THE TREES THAT GREW SINCE THEN HAVE NOW REACHED THE APPROPRIATE SIZE
IT'S SCORCHING OUT!


HERE WE GO!
MY WAIST HURTS.
THIS'LL DO NICELY.



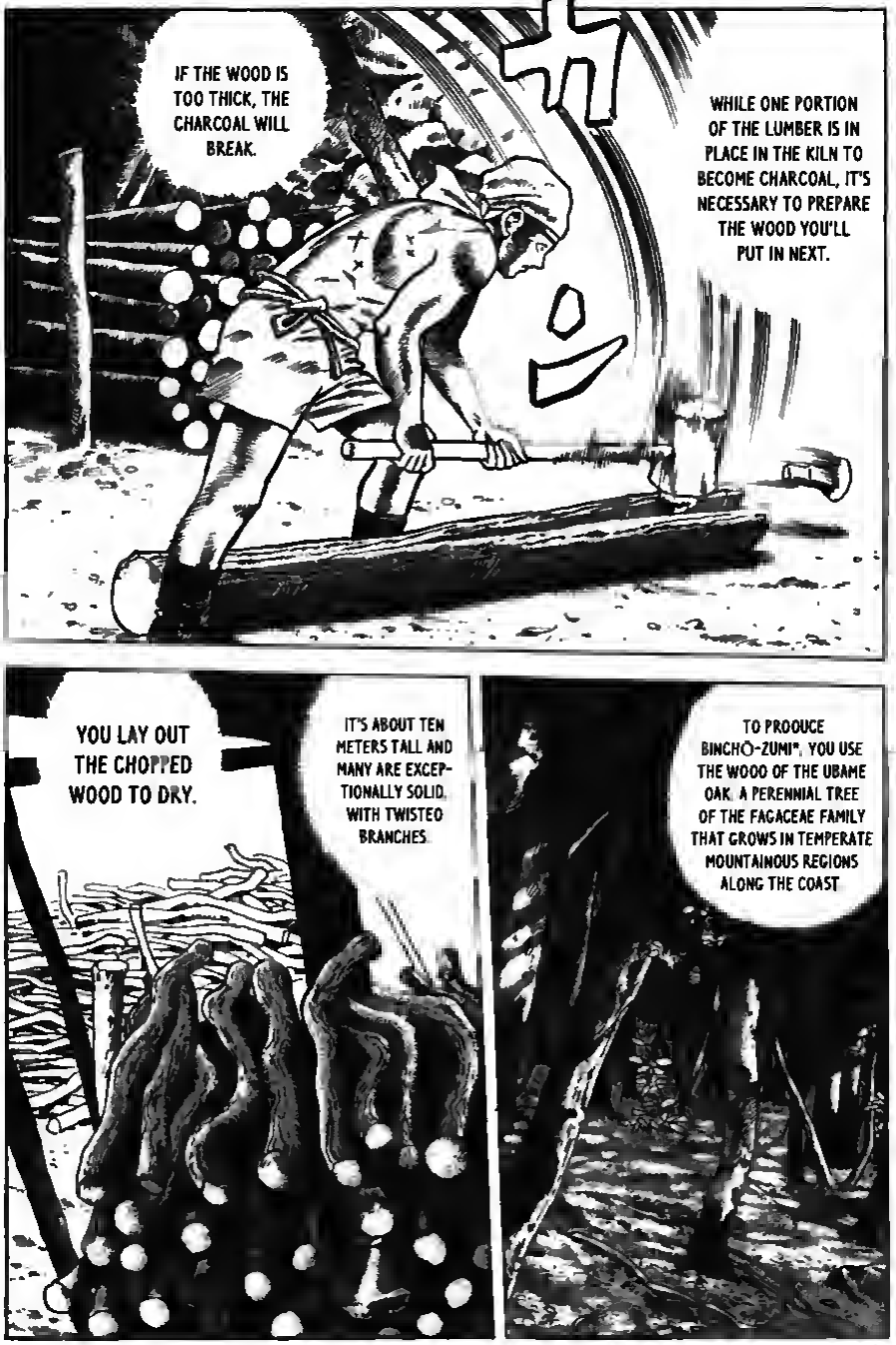
HUH? THAT PEBBLE IS MOVING...


IT'S NICE HOW YOU CAN SEE THE BOTTOM.

IT LOOKS LIKE IT'S DANCING.
TO MAKE YOUR RETURN WITH THE LUMBER ON YOUR SHOULDER, YOU'D GO ALONG WITH THE CURRENT AND IT WAS EASY ENOUGH
IT WAS AS IF IT HAD A LIFE OF ITS OWN AND WAS FROLICKING THROUGH THE WATER.
I HAD TO CROSS THE CURRENT WALKING SIDEWAYS, LIKE A CRAB.
YOU HAD TO GO AGAINST THE CURRENT ON YOUR WAY OUT.

AFTER HAVING COME AND GONE SEVERAL TIMES THE WATER WOULD CHILL YOUR BODY AND THE SAND WOULD CHAFE YOUR SKIN
CARRYING THE LUMBER ON MY SHOULDER TOOK A COLOSSAL EFFORT.
I WOULD COUGH SEVERAL TIMES TO CLEAR THE PHLEGM FROM MY THROAT.
AS SOON AS I DROPPED THE WOOD, FREEING MYSELF OF MY BURDEN...
A FEVERISH SENSATION SEIZED ME AND I FELL INTO A TRANCE

I THINK I'VE COME DOWN WITH SOMETHING.


IF THE WOOD IS TOO THICK, THE CHARCOAL WILL BREAK.
WHILE ONE PORTION OF THE LUMBER IS IN PLACE IN THE KILN TO BECOME CHARCOAL, IT'S NECESSARY TO PREPARE THE WOOD YOU'LL PUT IN NEXT.
YOU LAY OUT THE CHOPPED WOOD TO DRY.
IT'S ABOUT TEN METERS TALL AND MANY ARE EXCEPTIONALLY SOLID, WITH TWISTED BRANCHES.
TO PRODUCE BINCHŌ-ZUMI*, YOU USE THE WOOD OF THE UBAME OAK, A PERENNIAL TREE OF THE FAGACEAE FAMILY THAT GROWS IN TEMPERATE MOUNTAINOUS REGIONS ALONG THE COAST

HOWEVER, IF THERE ARE CRACKS IN THE WOOD THE CHARCOAL WON'T GIVE MUCH HEAT THEREFORE, YOU HAVE TO STICK THE WOOD IN THE KILN BEFORE IT GETS TOO ORIED OUT.
MY FATHER LIVED NEAR THE MOUTH OF THE VALLEY, AND I THREE HUNDRED METERS FROM THERE, SEPARATED BY A HILL.
I WAS AN APPRENTICE CHARCOAL MAKER WHO HAD JUST FINISHED HIGH SCHOOL.
ALTHOUGH MY FATHER AND I EACH HAD OUR OWN CABIN AND CHARCOAL OVEN...

NISHI NO TANI IS TEEMING WITH TANUKIS.
BON APPÉTIT.
FROM TIME TO TIME MY MOTHER BROUGHT ME FOOD.

DURING THE AFTERNOON I USED TO COOL OFF IN THE POND IN FRONT OF THE CABIN.

I SKINNY-DIPPED. THE WATER WAS FREEZING.

I ENSCONCED MYSELF IN THE SHADE UNDER A ROCK AND HELD MY BREATH, WHILE THE WATER CAME UP TO MY NECK. NEXT, I EMPTIED MY MIND.
IN THE EVENINGS I READ BY THE LIGHT OF A KEROSENE LANTERN

JUST A NARROW ENTRANCE.
THERE AREN'T ANY WINDOWS IN THE CABIN.
NATURALLY, SINCE IT'S NIGHT.
IT'S DARK.
I FIND IT HARD TO BREATHE.

THE WIND IS NICE...
I'LL GO WATCH THE FIRE.
BUT I CAN'T GET TO SLEEP.
SOMETIMES THE TANUKIS HANG AROUND THE CABIN OR EVEN GO INSIDE.

TANUKIS CAN FAKE THEIR OWN DEATHS.
THEY SAY THAT SOMETIMES WHEN YOU SHOOT AT THEM THEY FLOP TO THE GROUND EVEN WHEN THEY HAVEN'T BEEN HIT.
THE TANUKI RDSE UP IN A FURY.
GREEEEEA!
DNE HUNTER THDUGHT HE HAD KILLED DNE AND WAS ALL SET TD SKIN IT, WHEN SUDDENLY...

THIS TIME IT WAS DEAD FOR GOOD.
...IT FELL HEAVILY
AFTER WALKING UNSTEADILY FOR TEN METERS..
...OF CONTINUING TO FEIGN THEIR DEATHS WHILE YOU STRIP OFF THEIR SKIN
IF YOU STOP AND REFLECT, YOU SHUDDER TO THINK THAT THEIR DEFIANCE IS SUCH THAT THEY'RE CAPABLE...
...FALL UNCONSCIOUS
...ABOUT WHETHER THEY REALLY PLAY DEAD OR IF, ON THE CONTRARY, THEY SIMPLY...
HOWEVER, THERE ARE CONFLICTING OPINIONS..

I'D OCCASIONALLY DO MY MIDDAY TASKS TOGETHER WITH MY FATHER.
HOWEVER, AT NIGHT I WAS COMPLETELY ALONE.
AS THE NIGHT GREW ON, THE WIND CEASED AND THE WOODS FELL SILENT.

THAT WAS WHEN THEY CAME.
SOME SOUNDS IN THE DISTANCE.
AT FIRST IT WAS JUST A MURMUR, SCARCELY AUDIBLE.

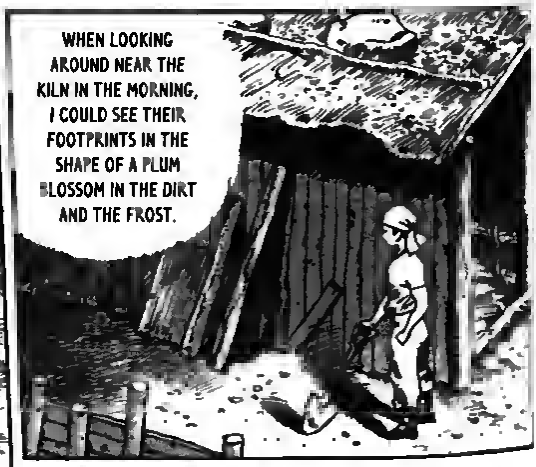
ECHOING AS IF SOMEONE HAD STRUCK A DRUM SOFTLY WITH THE TIPS OF THEIR FINGERS.
SOUNDS SEPARATED BY FOUR OR FIVE SECONDS.
OF COURSE, IT WAS AN ANIMAL SOUND.
IT WAS THEM, INHALING AND EXHALING AS THEY SEARCHED FOR EARTHWORMS AND FRUIT AMONG THE DRY LEAVES.
BUT FROM FAR AWAY IT SEEMED DILUTED
OR PERHAPS IT WAS THE SOUND OF SEVERAL TANUKIS THAT BLENDED TOGETHER AND HAD A RHYTHMIC CADENCE LIKE A DRUM.

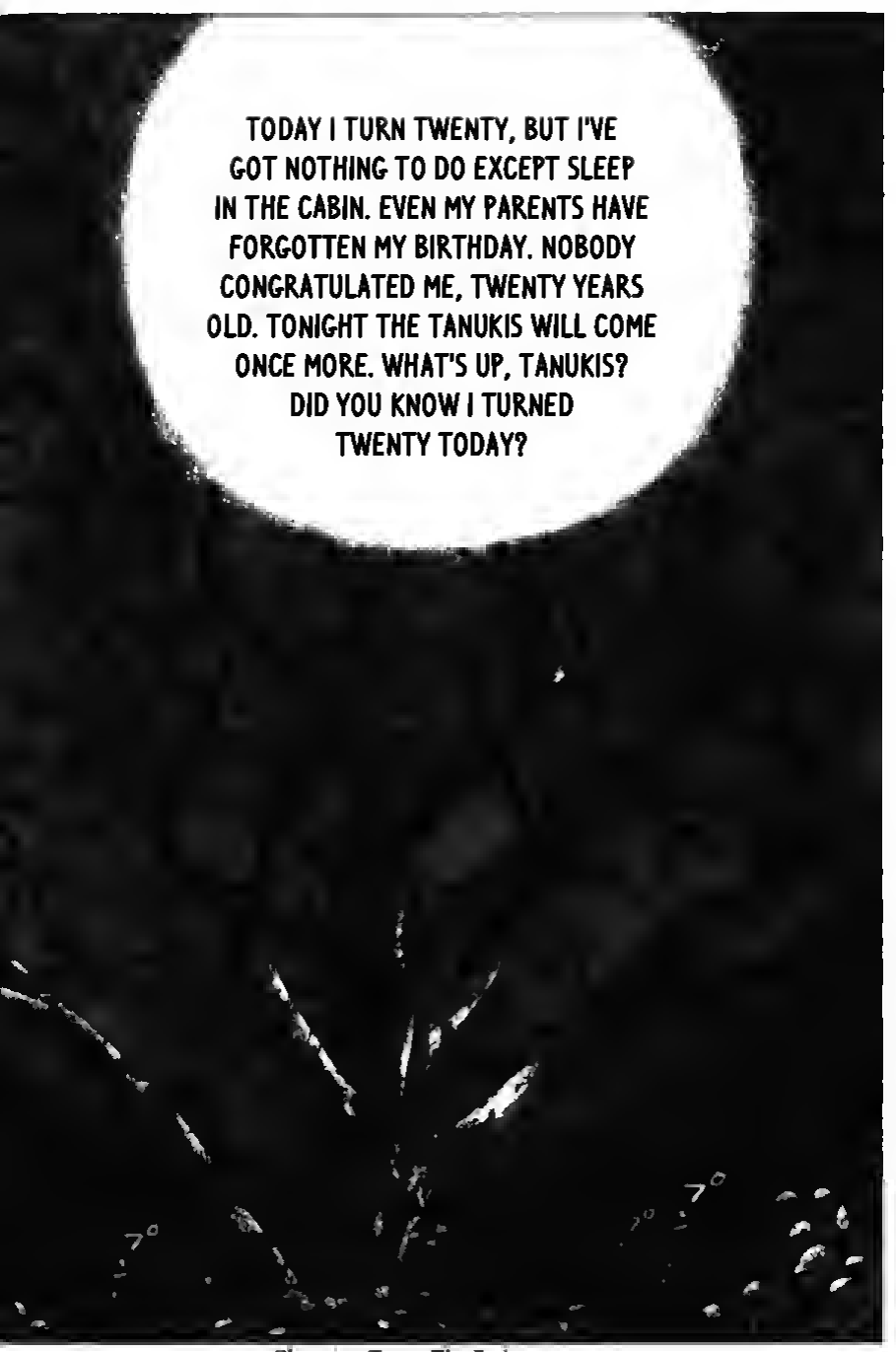
FROM TIME TO TIME THEY ATE HUMAN EXCREMENT AS A SOURCE OF SALT.
IT LOOKS LIKE THE TANUKIS ARE GOING TO MY LATRINE AGAIN
THEY ALWAYS BEHAVED IN A MANNER OF UTMOST CAUTION AND DISTRUST.
WHAT--- WHAT'S GOING ON?!
IF I CLEARED MY THROAT, THE SOUND WOULD STOP IMMEDIATELY.
ゴホン
HEY!

ALTHOUGH I WAS SELDOM ABLE TO SEE THEM...

GOOD... NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT.

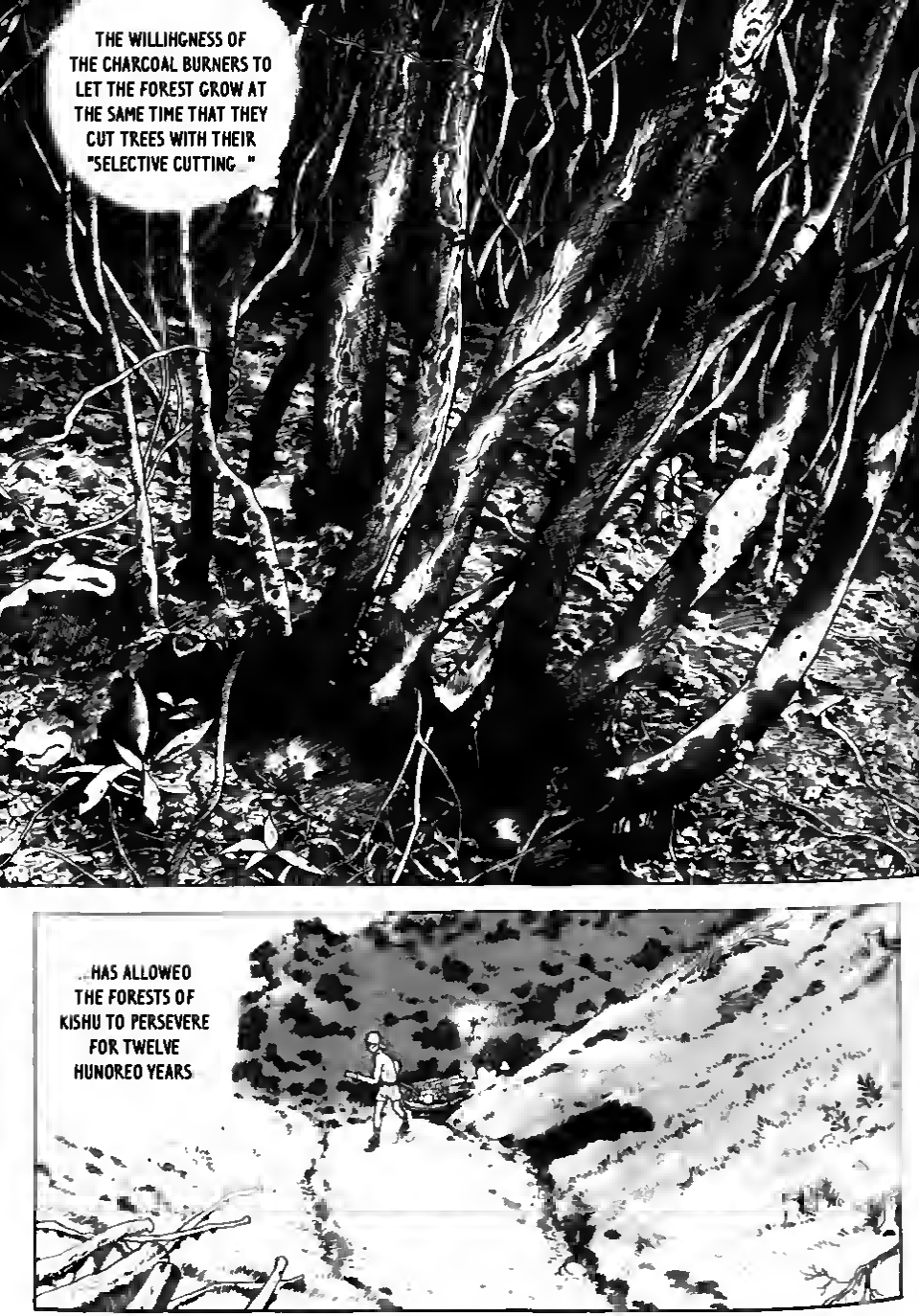
THAT WAS THE CALLING CARD LEFT BY THE ONLY FRIENDS WHO CAME TO VISIT ME.

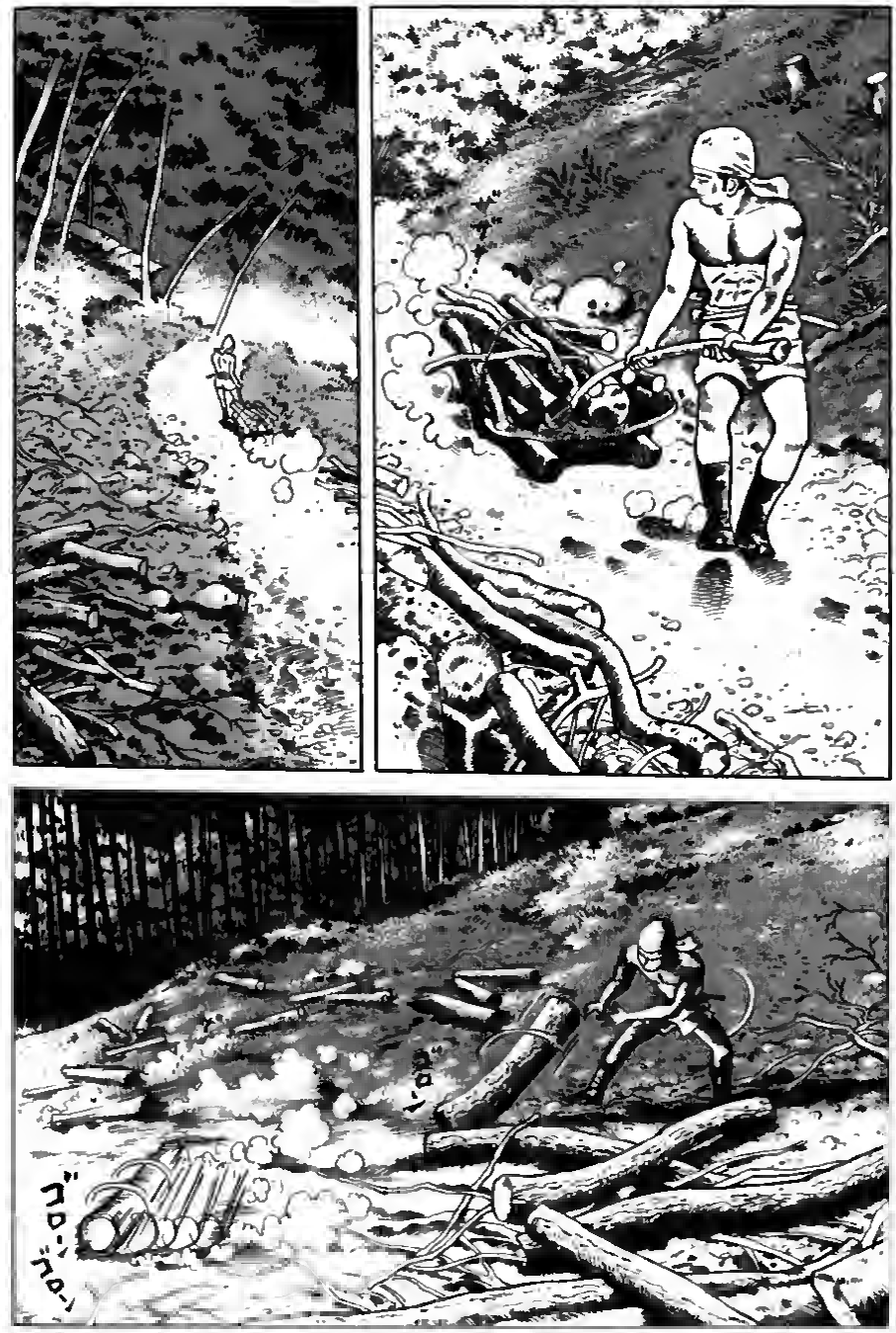

WHEN LOOKING AROUND NEAR THE KILN IN THE MORNING, I COULD SEE THEIR FOOTPRINTS IN THE SHAPE OF A PLUM BLOSSOM IN THE DIRT AND THE FROST.


TODAY I TURN TWENTY, BUT I'VE GOT NOTHING TO DO EXCEPT SLEEP IN THE CABIN. EVEN MY PARENTS HAVE FORGOTTEN MY BIRTHDAY. NOBODY CONGRATULATED ME, TWENTY YEARS OLD. TONIGHT THE TANUKIS WILL COME ONCE MORE. WHAT'S UP, TANUKIS? DID YOU KNOW I TURNED TWENTY TODAY?

Chapter 2: Burning the Charcoal

THE TREES YOU CUT DOWN ARE OAKS BETWEEN TWENTY AND THIRTY YEARS OLD.
THIS IS KNOWN AS "SELECTIVE CUTTING."
YOU LEAVE THE TREES THAT ARE TOO YOUNG SO THEY CAN GROW AND BE CUT OOWN IN THE FUTURE.


THE WILLINGNESS OF THE CHARCOAL BURNERS TO LET THE FOREST GROW AT THE SAME TIME THAT THEY CUT TREES WITH THEIR "SELECTIVE CUTTING..."
...HAS ALLOWED THE FORESTS OF KISHU TO PERSEVERE FOR TWELVE HUNDRED YEARS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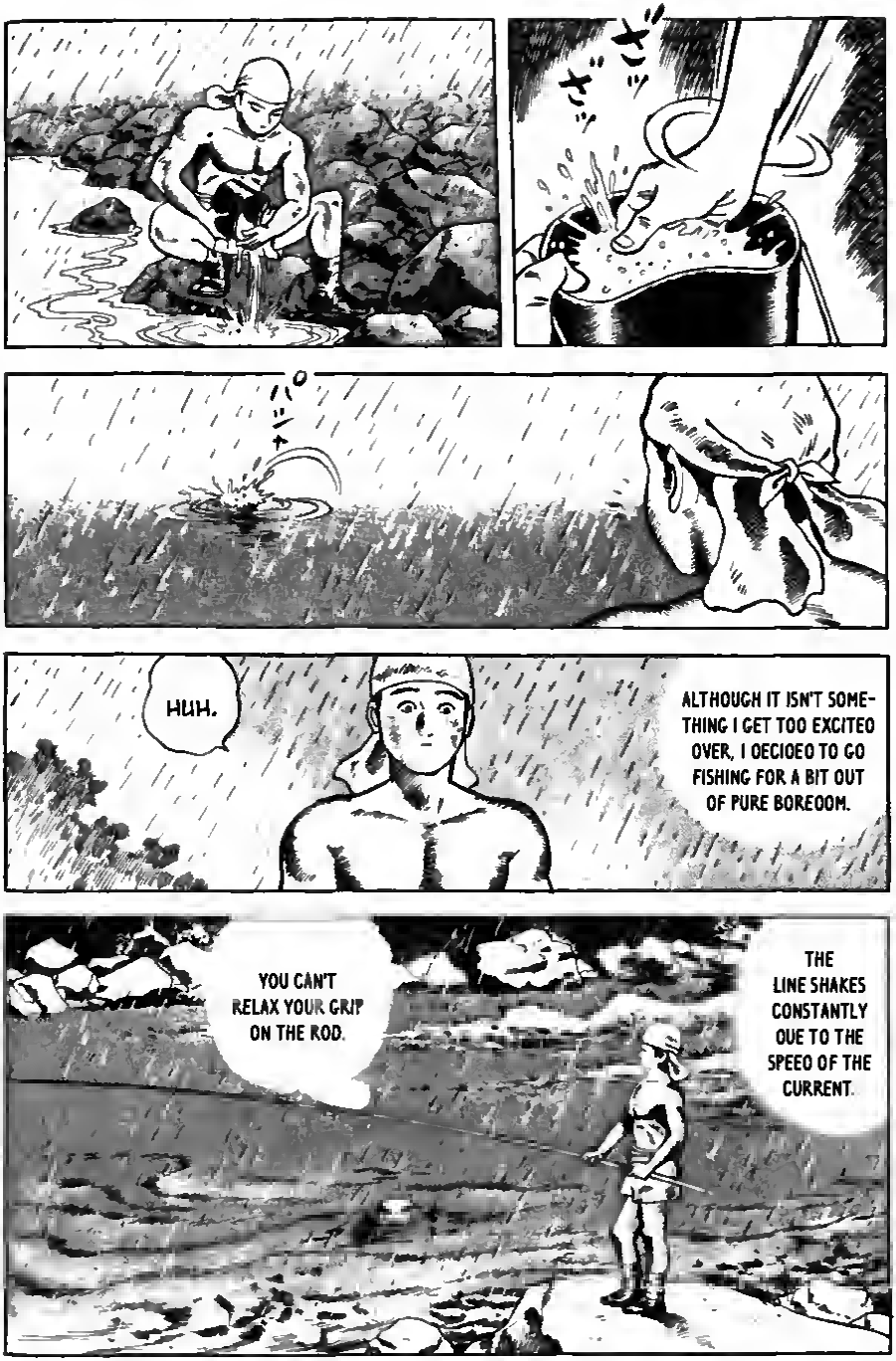
HOW NICE! IT'LL COOL ME OFF A BIT!
RAIN?
SHOOT...
HUH?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HUH.
ALTHOUGH IT ISN'T SOMETHING I GET TOO EXCITED OVER, I DECIDED TO GO FISHING FOR A BIT OUT OF PURE BOREDOM.
YOU CAN'T RELAX YOUR GRIP ON THE ROD.
THE LINE SHAKES CONSTANTLY DUE TO THE SPEED OF THE CURRENT.

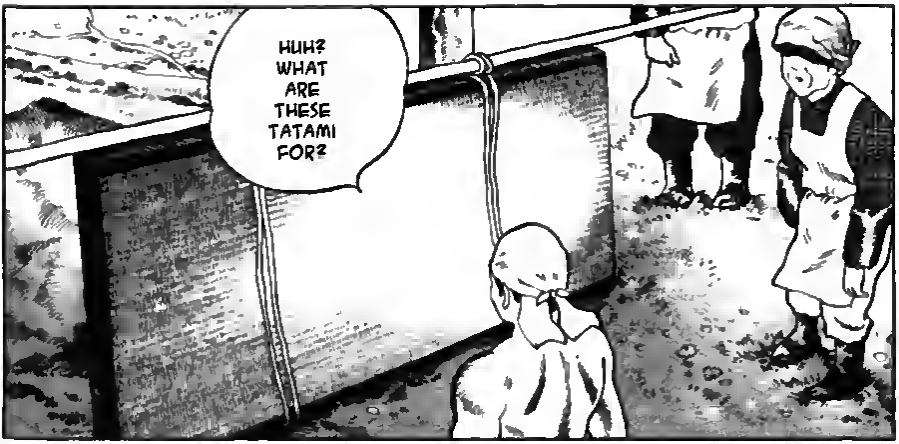
THERE WASN'T ANY SIGN THAT THE FISH WERE COMING.
HMM.

I WAITED PATIENTLY, SITTING ON A ROCK.
AFTERWARD I LAY DOWN ATOP IT TO SLEEP.
MY BODY WAS COVERED WITH CUTS AND BLISTERS FROM THORNS, SPLINTERS AND ROCKS.
OW, OUCH ...
THE ROCK DUG INTO MY BARE BACK AND MY REAR.

AFTER LYING ON THE STONE FOR A WHILE, DROWSINESS OVERWHELMED ME AND I TOOK A NAP
A HORSEFLY WOKE ME UP, AND I WENT BACK TO THE CABIN

TWO WOMEN WERE WAITING FOR ME, WHO WERE WORKING ON THE REFORESTATION OF THE TREES IN THE INTERIOR OF THE VALLEY.

THEY HAD BROUGHT TWO TATAMI MATS UNDER THEIR OWN EFFORTS, AFTER FOLDING THEM IN HALF AND TYING THEM TO A ROD IN ORDER TO CARRY IT ON THEIR SHOULDERS, ONE IN FRONT AND THE OTHER BEHIND.

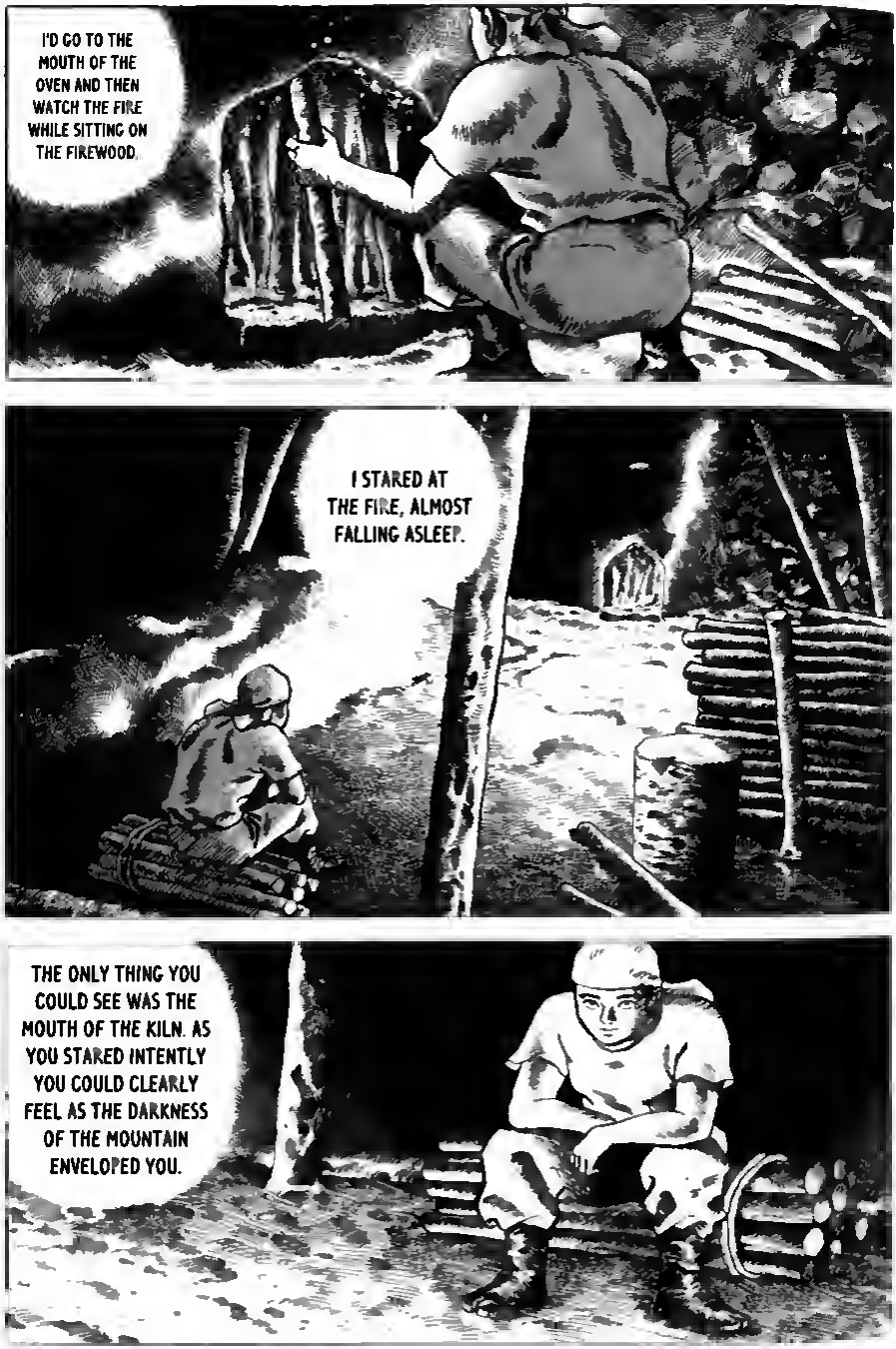

HUH? WHAT ARE THESE TATAMI FOR?

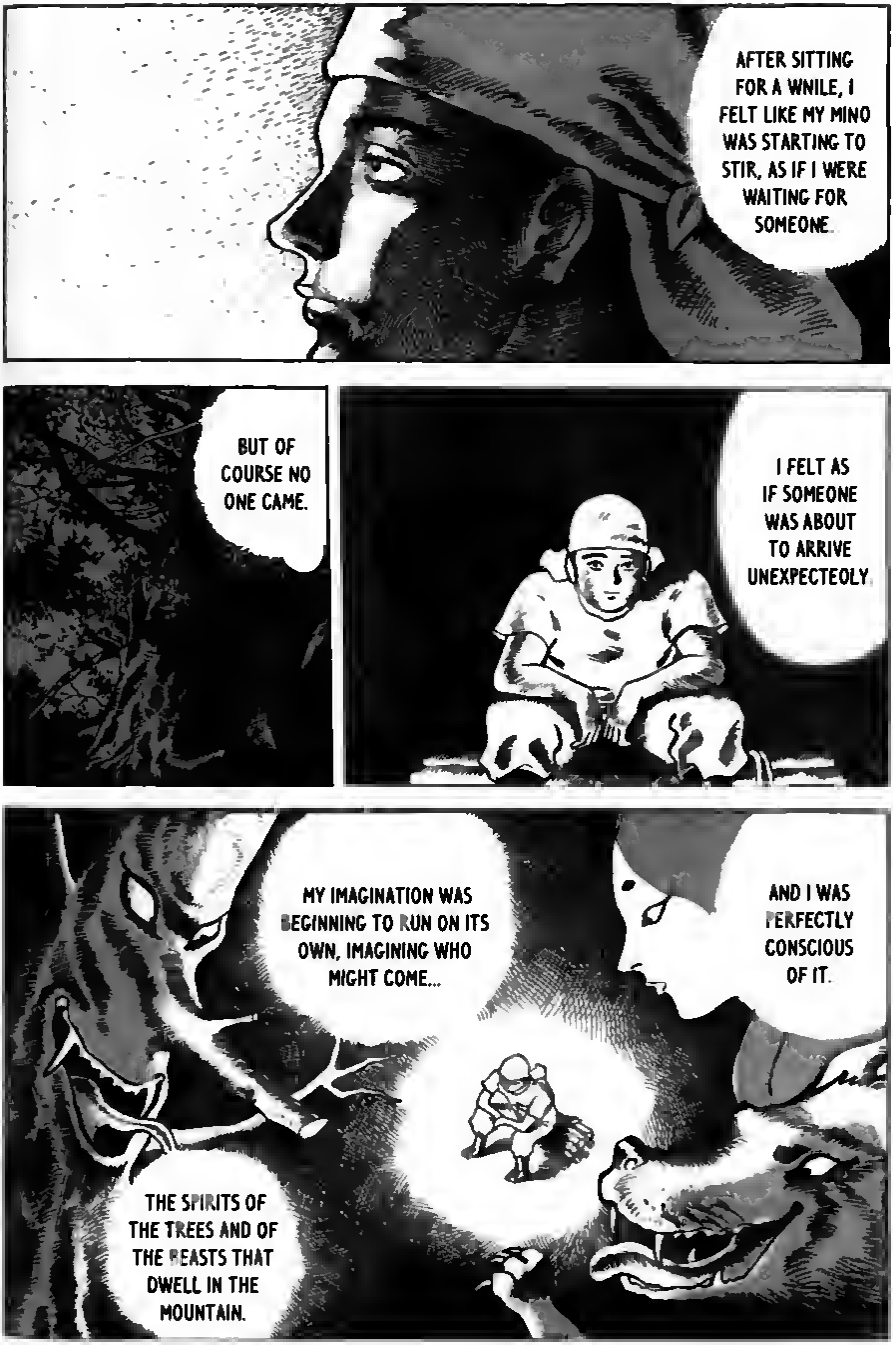
THEY'VE GIVEN US THESE OLD TATAMI, BUT IF WE LEAVE THEM THERE...
THEY'RE CHANGING THE TATAMI IN THE DISTRICT'S FORESTRY OFFICE.
SOMEONE MIGHT RUN OFF WITH 'EM, SO WE BROUGHT 'EM WITH US.
YOU MIND IF WE LEAVE 'EM HERE?
IT'S ALREADY LATE TODAY AND WE CAN'T BRING THEM HOME NOW.
OF COURSE NOT! GO RIGHT AHEAD.

AH, THERE. THAT'S WHERE I STACK THE CHARCOAL AND THEY'D GET IN THE WAY.
WHERE'S THE BEST PLACE TO LEAVE THEM FOR YOU? CAN WE PUT THEM THERE?
THERE ISN'T MUCH ROOM INSIDE...
WELL...
HOW ABOUT INSIDE THE CABIN?
LET'S DO THAT.
THAT'S FINE, INSIDE THE CABIN WON'T BE ANY TROUBLE.
HMMM.

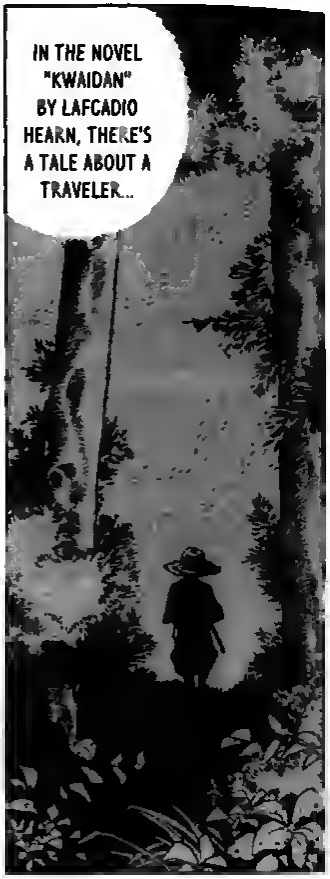
BUT PEOPLE FROM ALL AROUND SAY THEY WANT THEM AND THEY TOOK THEM AWAY.
DO YOU HAVE MORE TATAMI LIKE THIS?
YES. THEY'VE SWITCHED OUT ABOUT THIRTY OF THEM.
THEY'VE GIVEN US FOUR OTHERS. WE'LL BRING THEM HERE TOO.
WHENEVER YOU LIKE.
I'D NEVER HEARD OF A CHARCOAL BURNER'S CABIN WITH TATAMI MATS.
TONIGHT I'M GONNA BE ABLE TO SLEEP ON A TATAMI, LIKE A PERSON

I WAS UP LATE INTO THE NIGHT, STOKING THE FIRE IN THE KILN.
PUTTING WOOD IN THE FIRE EVERY TWO HOURS IS SUFFICIENT.
BUT THIS ISN'T SOMETHING YOU CAN LEAVE OFF DDING, EVEN IF YOU'RE IN THE CABIN


I'D GO TO THE MOUTH OF THE OVEN AND THEN WATCH THE FIRE WHILE SITTING ON THE FIREWOOD.
I STARED AT THE FIRE, ALMOST FALLING ASLEEP.
THE ONLY THING YOU COULD SEE WAS THE MOUTH OF THE KILN. AS YOU STARED INTENTLY YOU COULD CLEARLY FEEL AS THE DARKNESS OF THE MOUNTAIN ENVELOPED YOU.


AFTER SITTING FOR A WHILE, I FELT LIKE MY MIND WAS STARTING TO STIR, AS IF I WERE WAITING FOR SOMEONE.
BUT OF COURSE NO ONE CAME.
I FELT AS IF SOMEONE WAS ABOUT TO ARRIVE UNEXPECTEDLY.
MY IMAGINATION WAS BEGINNING TO RUN ON ITS OWN, IMAGINING WHO MIGHT COME...
AND I WAS PERFECTLY CONSCIOUS OF IT.
THE SPIRITS OF THE TREES AND OF THE BEASTS THAT DWELL IN THE MOUNTAIN.

...WHO, ON A LONELY MOUNTAIN, STUMBLES ACROSS A HUT WHERE A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN LIVES, WITH WHOM HE FALLS IN LOVE AND TAKES AS HIS WIFE.

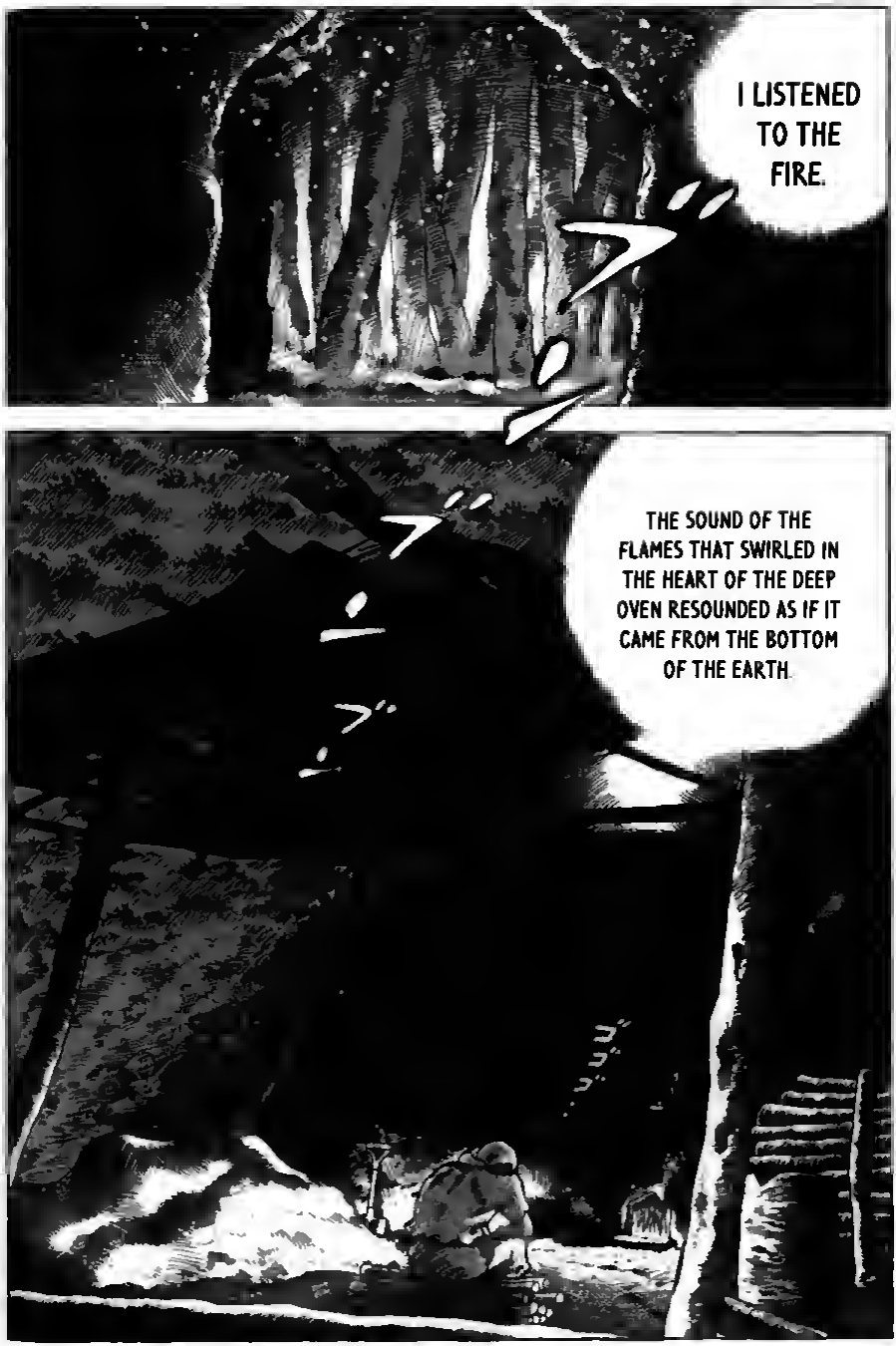

IN THE NOVEL "KWAIDAN" BY LAFCADIO HEARN, THERE'S A TALE ABOUT A TRAVELER...

BUT IN THE END IT TURNS OUT THAT WOMAN IS THE SPIRIT OF A SAUCE.

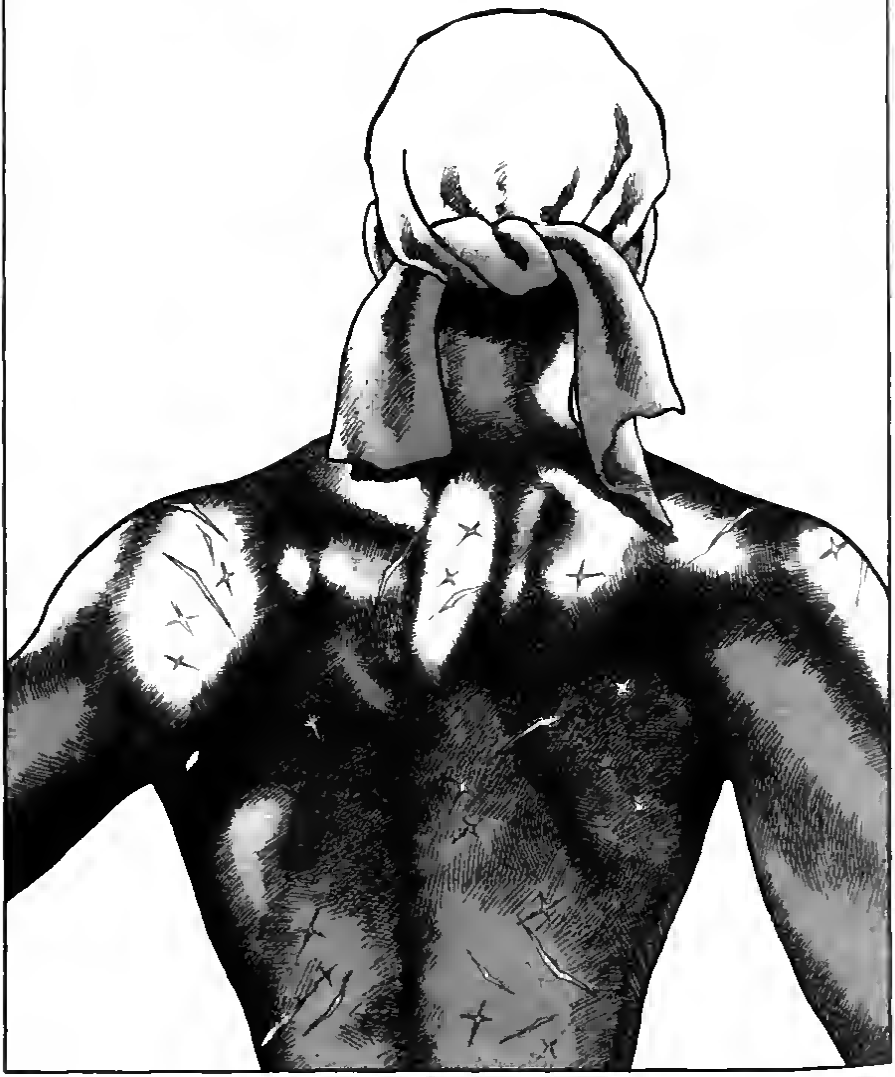
THE TALE IS CALLED AOYANAGI*, OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT. IT SEEMS TO ME TO BEAR A CURIOUS RESEMBLANCE TO REAL LIFE.

BEING ALONE IN THE MOUNTAINS, YOU CAN LOSE YOURSELF IN THESE FANTASIES.
. AND SETTLE ON MY CHEEK AND ON THE FUTON WHERE I WAS SLEEPING.
THE SNOW WOULD GET IN THROUGH THE DOOR AND BETWEEN THE CRACKS IN THE BOARDS...
ON OCCASION, I DREAMT ABOUT THE LADY OF THE SNOW ON BLIZZARDY NIGHTS.
LATE IN THE EVENINGS WHEN THE GALE ECHOED OMINOUSLY THROUGH THE MOUNTAIN, WITHOUT OPENING THE WOODEN DOOR OF MY CABIN...

...THE LADY OF THE SNOW WOULD BE STANDING THERE.


I LISTENED TO THE FIRE.
THE SOUND OF THE FLAMES THAT SWIRLED IN THE HEART OF THE DEEP OVEN RESOUNDED AS IF IT CAME FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE EARTH.

Chapter 3:
Taking Out the Charcoal



THE WOOD HAD BURNED AND TURNED INTO CHARCOAL.
WHITE SMOKE STOPPED RISING FROM THE KILN'S CHIMNEY.

...YOU SHOULD OPEN NEW HOLES LITTLE BY LITTLE SO THAT THE AIR SEEPS THROUGH.
FOR THE CHARCOAL TO BE FIRM, WITH A NICE SHEEN...
YOU CLOSE OFF THE OVEN WITH CLAY, LEAVING SOME HOLES FOR AIR.
AS YOU OPEN THE MOUTH OF THE KILN, THE CHARCOAL BEGINS TO SHINE AND A PALE FLAME SPRINGS UP.
THIS IS KNOWN AS "TEMPERING THE CHARCOAL."
OPENING THE MOUTH OF THE KILN BIT BY BIT TAKES ROUGHLY ONE FULL DAY

I WAS FULL OF ANXIETY OVER HOW THE CHARCOAL WOULD TURN OUT.
YOU TIE THE THINNER PIECES INTO BUNDLES.
WHILE YOU'RE DOING THIS, YOU SPLIT THE THICK FIREWOOD INTO TWO OR FOUR PARTS
THE BINCHŌ-ZUMI MUST BE BRILLIANT, AND SO COMPACT AND SOLID THAT IT MAKES A METALLIC SOUND WHEN STRUCK.
AT TIMES IT MIGHT END UP SOFT, WITH NO CONSISTENCY, OR DISINTEGRATE INTO SMITHEREENS.

AS THE OVEN'S OPENING GROWS LARGER, THE HEAT IN THE INTERIOR RISES, CREATING A GOLDEN WHIRLWIND THAT STOKES THE FLAMES.
BUT THERE WAS STILL SOME TIME BEFORE THAT.
WHEN YOU SEE THAT THE COMBUSTION INSIDE THE KILN HAS REACHED ITS PEAK AND THE CHARCOAL IS SHINING WITH A GOLDEN COLOR, YOU MUST TAKE IT OUT.
FOR DINNER I HAD SOME RICE PORRIDGE WITH TEA AND SOMEN WITH MISO

I DECIDED TO SLEEP FOR A BIT.
THANKS TO THE SOUND OF THE FIRE I MANAGED TO FALL RIGHT ASLEEP
BUT THE INCESSANT NOISE OF THE RAIN UPON THE CABIN WOKE ME UP.
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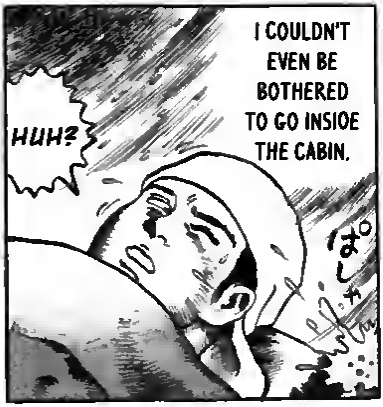
I COULDN'T EVEN BE BOTHERED TO GO INSIDE THE CABIN.
HUH?
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BUT DESPITE EVERYTHING, I MANAGED TO GET BACK TO SLEEP.
ばばばばばば…

BAH! THIS IS NOTHING...
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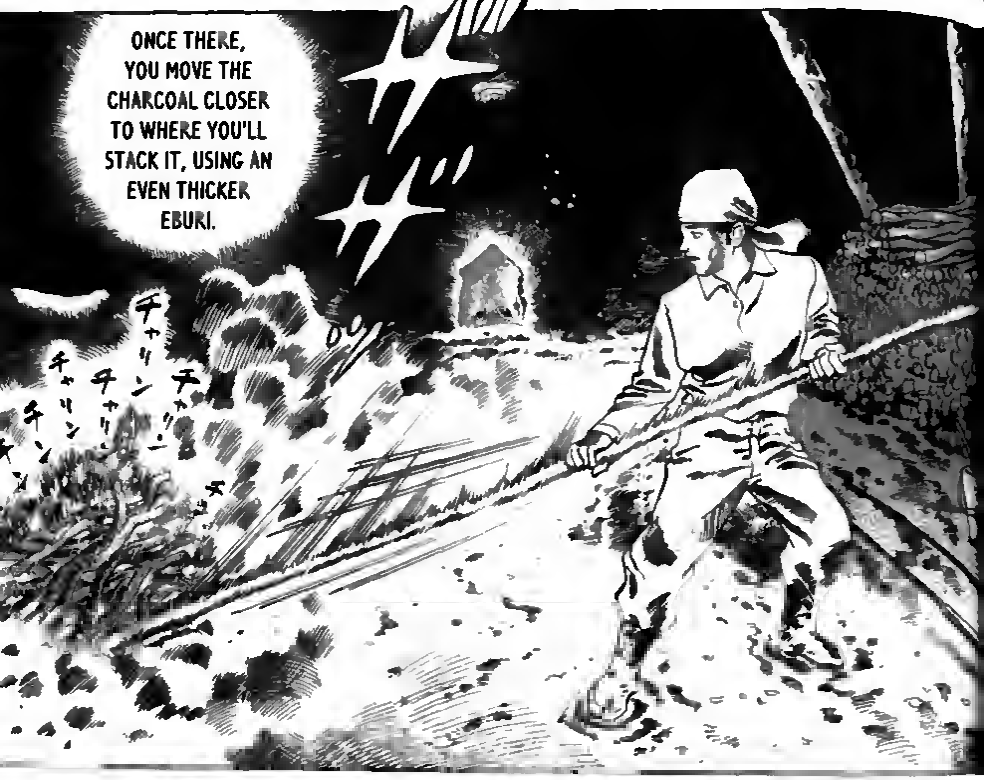
A PALE, BLUISH FLAME EMERGED FROM THE KILN'S OPENING.
THE NEXT TIME I OPENED MY EYES A LIGHT RAIN WAS FALLING, BLENDING INTO THE WIND.
AFTER RESTORING MY STRENGTH WITH THE PORRIDGE, I GOT DRESSED AND PUT ON MY JIKATABI*

I COULDN'T DO THIS UNDRESSED, LIKE WHEN I CHOP FIREWOOD.
RIGHT THEN!
LET'S GO TO WORK!

YOU DRAG THE CHARCOAL TO THE MOUTH OF THE OVEN WITH AN IRON EBURI*.
NEXT YOU TAKE IT OUT USING ANOTHER EBURI AND PLUNK IT ON THE GROUND.
YOU LEAVE IT THERE TO COOL IT DOWN AND TEMPER IT WITH THE AIR.


ONCE THERE, YOU MOVE THE CHARCOAL CLOSER TO WHERE YOU'LL STACK IT, USING AN EVEN THICKER EBURI.
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YOU TOSS ASHES ON IT WITH A SHOVEL TO DOUSE THE FIRE

YOU REPEAT THE SAME PROCESS.
THAT'S HOW YOU'D GO ABOUT REMOVING THE FORTY BALES (EACH BALE WEIGHS AROUND FIFTEEN KILOS) OF RED-HOT CHARCOAL THAT ARE INSIDE THE KILN.
THAT CHARCOAL DIDN'T TURN OUT WELL.
THE CHARCOAL FROM ONE SECTION OF THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE OVEN FELL APART.

I'M SURE THERE WAS A ROCK BURIED JUST OUTSIDE THE KILN AND THE RAIN HAD PULLED IT INSIDE.
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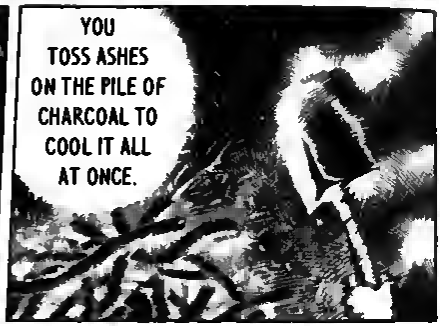
THIS ASH LEAVES WHITE SPOTS ON THE CHARCOAL. THAT'S WHY BINCHŌ-ZUMI IS ALSO KNOWN AS "WHITE CHARCOAL."


YOU TOSS ASHES ON THE PILE OF CHARCOAL TO COOL IT ALL AT ONCE.

THEY RISE OUT FROM THE MOUTH OF THE OVEN AND END UP MELTING INTO THE DARKNESS.
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EACH TIME YOU USE THE EBURI, SCADS OF SPARKS FLY UP FROM THE CHARCOAL.
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IT'S PUSHING THE EBURI AROUND.
THE DIRECTION OF THE WIND HAS CHANGED AGAIN.
WHAT'S MORE, IT'S SENDING SPARKS THIS WAY.
OW!

FROM TIME TO TIME I TOOK A LITTLE BREAK.
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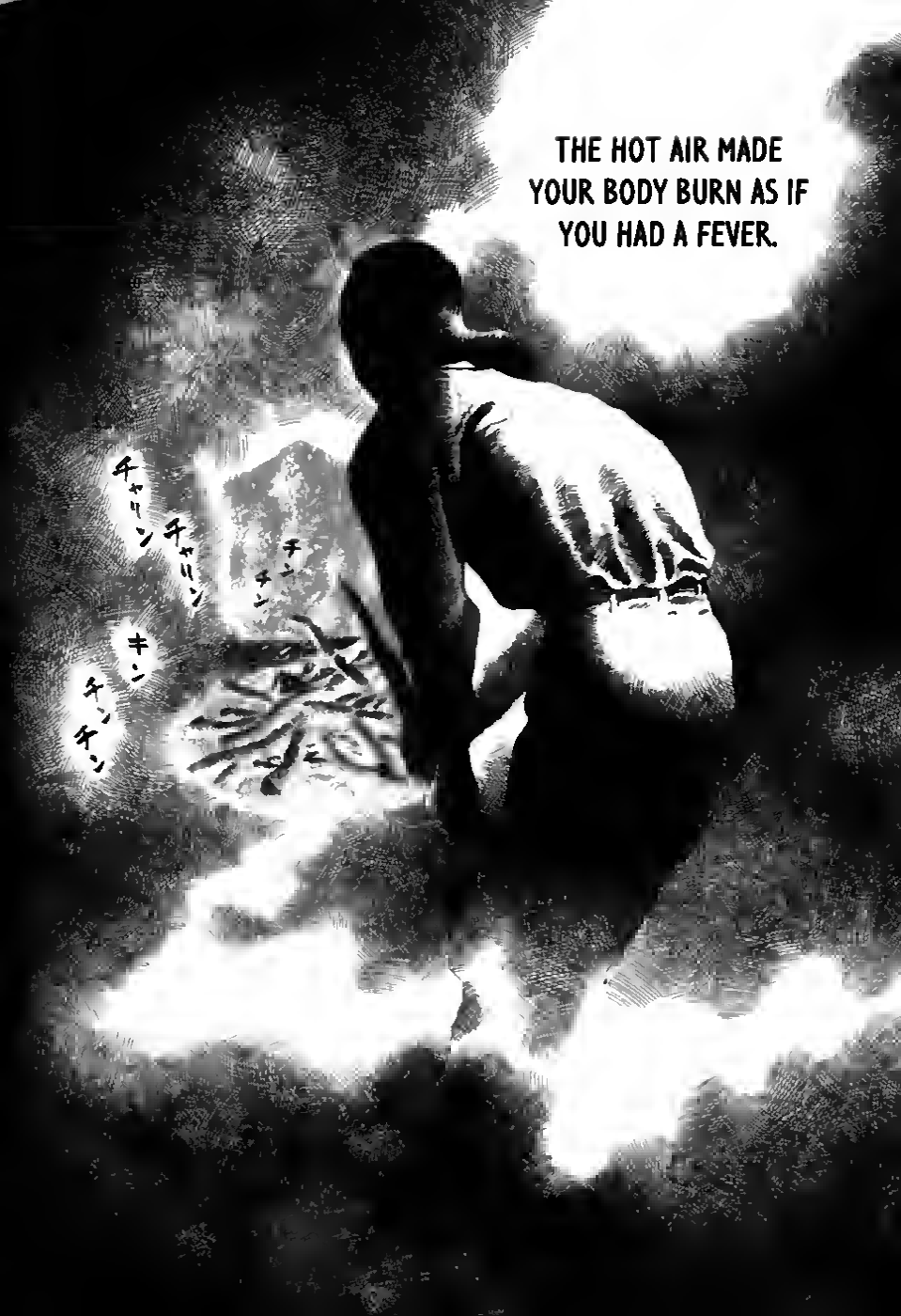
...I WAS LEFT HYPNOTIZED BY THE OVEN'S RED MOUTH.
EVEN WHILE I WAS HAVING A DRINK, AT TIMES, IN THE DARKNESS...

THAT FIRE WORE AWAY AT THE EYES AND THE NERVES.
RED, WHITE AND BLUE FLAMES SPRANG FORTH FROM IT.
BUT THEY DIDN'T STAY THERE VERY LONG, AND DISAPPEARED A SHORT WHILE THEREAFTER.
WHEN I LAY DOWN TO SLEEP FOR A BIT, THOUGHTS BEGAN TO WELL UP IN MY HEAD.
WITH THE EBURI IN YOUR HANDS AND YOUR BODY FACING THE CHARCOAL FIRE, YOU FELT A HELLISH HEAT ON YOUR FACE AND THE FRONT OF YOUR TORSO.


THE HOT AIR MADE YOUR BODY BURN AS IF YOU HAD A FEVER.
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YOU'D LOSE ALL SENSE OF WHETHER IT WAS STILL NIGHT OR IF THE SUN HAD ALREADY RISEN.
A KAJIKA FROG WAS CROAKING UNDER THE RAIN.
THE SOUND THAT SURGED FROM THE HEART OF THE DARKNESS CONTINUED WITHOUT LETTING UP FOR A MOMENT.
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AS I LOOKED TOWARD THE VALLEY, I COULD MAKE OUT THE TURBULENT CURRENT OF THE RIVER, A PATCH OF WHITE IN THE DARKNESS.
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...AND LET A RAY OF LIGHT FROM THE MOON THROUGH.
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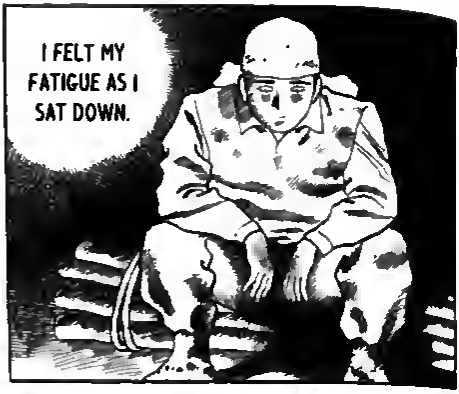
BUT THE SUN HADN'T RISEN YET. THE SKY HAD MERELY CLEARED UP FOR A MOMENT..
BECAUSE OF THE FIRE'S HEAT, THE EBURI WAS BEGINNING TO MELT AND DEFORM.
AS THE CHARCOAL THAT WAS LEFT WAS FURTHER TO THE BACK, THE WORK GREW MORE COMPLICATED.
IT WAS A HARD TASK

AND I FINALLY FELL ASLEEP.


I FELT MY FATIGUE AS I SAT DOWN.

LITTLE BY LITTLE, THE WHITE STONES OF THE VALLEY EMERGED FROM THE DARKNESS.

AFTER A WHILE, THE SUN ROSE.

NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENED, THE SUNRISE ALWAYS INSPIRED A FEELING OF LIBERATION IN ME.

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I'D FINISHED TAKING OUT ALL OF THE CHARCOAL.

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Taking Out the Charcoal, The End.

Chapter 4: Preparing the Fire

IT SEEMS I SLEPT FOR ABOUT FOUR HOURS AFTER I FINISHED TAKING OUT THE CHARCOAL.
FOR BEST RESULTS, IT'S PREFERABLE TO DO THIS WHILE THE KILN IS STILL HOT.
PREPARING THE FIRE CONSISTS OF PUTTING MORE WOOD IN THE KILN AFTER REMOVING ALL THE CHARCOAL.
NOW I HAD TO PREPARE THE FIRE AGAIN.

I COULDN'T TELL YOU WHAT IT IS IN DEGREES, BUT THE OVEN'S TEMPERATURE IS MANAGEABLE FOR THE BODY.
BUT THAT'S NOT TO SAY IT'S THE LEAST BIT PLEASANT.
ばぁ

YOU HAVE TO WEAR OLD CLOTHES THAT ARE THOROUGHLY DRENCHED IN WATER, COVERING YOURSELF FROM HEAD TO TOE.
LEVELING OUT THE FLOOR MIXES IN THE COOL AIR, AND YOU CAN ENTER THE INTERIOR SHORTLY AFTER.
BEFORE STARTING TO MAKE THE FIRE, YOU POUR ASHES ON THE KILN'S FLOOR TO LEAVE IT LEVEL.

I LINED THEM UP VERTICALLY, TIED IN BUNDLES, STARTING FROM THE BACK OF THE KILN
NEXT I WENT IN CARRYING SOME STICKS ABOUT ONE METER EIGHTY LONG
AS I CAME AND WENT THE TEMPERATURE WAS STEADILY DESCENDING.
AT FIRST THE HEAT WAS SO UNBEARABLE THAT I WENT RUNNING OUT AS SOON AS THE WOOD LEFT MY HANDS.
PREPARING THE FIRE AND TAKING OUT THE CHARCOAL ARE THE HARDEST JOBS FOR A CHARCOAL BURNER.

FROM TIME TO TIME I'D GO DOWN TO THE VALLEY FOR A SWIM.
AND ONCE AGAIN I'D PLUNGE INSIDE THAT VORTEX OF SWELTERING AIR.
AFTER COOLING OFF, I WENT BACK TO WORK.
AND SO I WENT BACK AND FORTH FROM THE KILN TO MY WOODPILE AGAIN AND AGAIN.

MY JIKATABI ALSO BEGAN TO ROAST ON TOP OF THE SCORCHING FLOOR.
MY SOAKING WET CLOTHES WERE DRY AGAIN IN AN INSTANT.
THERE WERE STILL SOME RED-HOT CHUNKS OF CHARCOAL LEFT BEHIND.
IT WAS HORRIFYINGLY HOT.

AND THEN I COOLED MY BODY THAT WAS DRENCHED IN SWEAT.
I JUMPED INTO THE RIVER WITH MY JIKATABI ON TO COOL THEM DOWN.
?
!
AT LAST I HAD FINISHED.
IT TOOK FOUR HOURS, MORE OR LESS.

WITH THE PALM OF MY HAND AND MY FINGERS I WENT ABOUT MOLDING IT
FOR THE NEXT STEP, I KNEADED CLAY AND SPREAD IT WITH THE PALM OF MY HAND.
I LEFT IMPRINTS OF MY FINGERS TO CREATE AN UNEVEN SURFACE. IT WOULD HARDEN UP WHEN THE FIRE WAS LIT.
MY MOTHER TOOK CARE OF TYING UP THE CHARCOAL I TOOK OUT OF THE OVEN INTO BALES.

I HADN'T GONE DOWN THE MOUNTAIN IN QUITE SOME TIME.
WHEN I WAS IN MIDDLE SCHOOL, I USED TO WALK DOWN THIS PATH CARRYING TWO BALES OF CHARCOAL ON MY BACK.

AS THEY GOT PAID TO TAKE THEM, FROM TIME TO TIME BOYS MY AGE FROM THE VILLAGE WOULD COME CARRY THEM TOO
BACK THEN, I COULD CARRY TWO BALES WEIGHING FIFTEEN KILOS EACH AT THE SAME TIME.
SOMETIMES, BEFORE THOSE SAME FRIENDS, I SNARED A RABBIT USING A TRAP
AS IT WAS A TIME WHEN FOOD WAS SCARCE, THEY WERE ALWAYS DELIGHTED.
MY MOTHER WOULD COOK IT RIGHT AWAY AND MAKE RABBIT STEW, WHICH I THEN ATE WITH MY FRIENDS.

EVERYONE IN MY HOUSE KNEW HOW TO SET ONE UP. EVEN MY MOTHER WAS AN EXPERT.
TO HUNT RABBITS YOU USED A TRAP, WHICH YOU COULD MAKE IN LESS THAN FIVE MINUTES USING A FINE WIRE.
SHE WAS ALSO THE ONE WHO TOOK CARE OF CLEANING THEM ONCE THEY WERE CAUGHT. SHE'D GO TO THE BANK OF THE STREAM...
BACK IN THE DAYS WHEN I WAS ATTENDING MIDDLE SCHOOL, I WAS ALREADY ABLE TO HUNT RABBITS WITHOUT ANYONE'S HELP.
...THEN SHE'D DRIVE A KNIFE INTO THEIR PAUNCH AND STRIP OFF THEIR SKIN.

IF YOU PAY ATTENTION, YOU CAN UNCOVER THE PATHS RABBITS FREQUENT...
ONE PLACE WHERE I OFTEN SET A TRAP WAS ON THE PATH FROM HOME TO THE VILLAGE SCHOOL.
...BY LOOKING FOR CHEWED UP PLANTS AND BUSH LEAVES...
I'D STILL BE ABLE TO SAY TO THIS DAY WHETHER OR NOT RABBITS PASS BY A GIVEN PLACE.
...OR EXAMINING THEIR DROP-PINGS TO SEE IF THEY'RE FRESH.
...FALLEN LEAVES THAT HAVE BEEN TRAMPLED.
THERE WERE TIMES THAT I SET A TRAP IN THE MORNING AND IT HAD ALREADY SNAGGED A BIG ONE BY THE TIME I CAME BACK THAT AFTER-NOON.
I WOULD FASTEN ONE END OF THE TRAP TO A TREE TRUNK

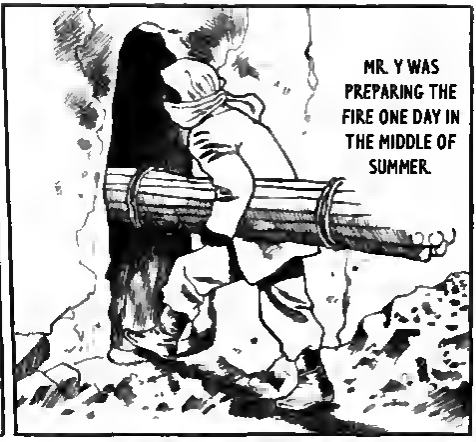
ONCE IN THE CABIN, WE'D SIT AROUND THE POT THAT WAS HANG-ING ABOVE THE HEARTH
I'D SLING IT OVER MY SHOULDER AS IF IT WERE A BACKPACK AND KEEP ON WALKING
...WHILE I WAS WAIT-ING FOR THE MEAT TO COOK.
EVEN TODAY, I REMEMBER THAT FEELING OF HAPPINESS I FELT...
I BUMPED INTO SOME ACQUAINTANCES. MR. AND MRS. Y, AND THEIR SON, WHO HAD JUST FINISHED MIDDLE SCHOOL. IT SEEMS THEY HAD COME UP THE MOUNTAIN PASS.

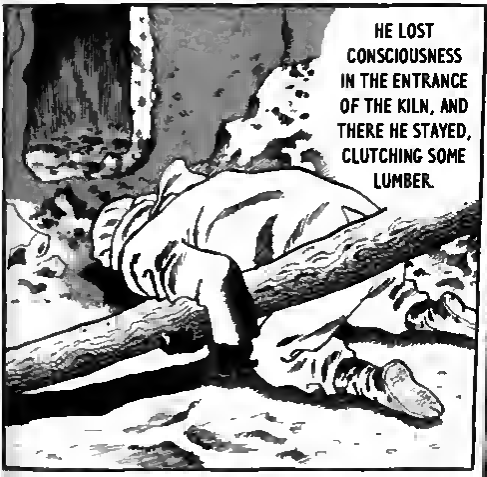
THE WHOLE FAMILY WORKED TENDING TO THE WOODS BELONGING TO THE FORESTRY COOPERATIVE
YOU GOING BACK BECAUSE OF THE HEAT?
WHEN YOU'RE DOING THAT IN SUMMER IT'S REALLY SOMETHING ELSE, AIN'T IT?
YEP, TODAY I WAS PREPARING THE FIRE IN THE KILN.
YOU DON'T KNOW THE HALF OF IT...

IN THIS HEAT THE ONLY THING YOU CAN DO IS TAKE A DIP IN THE RIVER.
THEY SAY IT'S A BAD IDEA.
THAT'S JUST TERRIBLE FOR YOUR HEALTH.
SAY, DO YOU DO THAT?
THAT BOY WAS ALSO PREPARING THE FIRE AND BATHED IN THE RIVER TO COOL OFF.
I HEARD A LITTLE WHILE BACK THAT A CHARCOAL BURNER DID THAT VERY THING AND IT KILLED HIM.

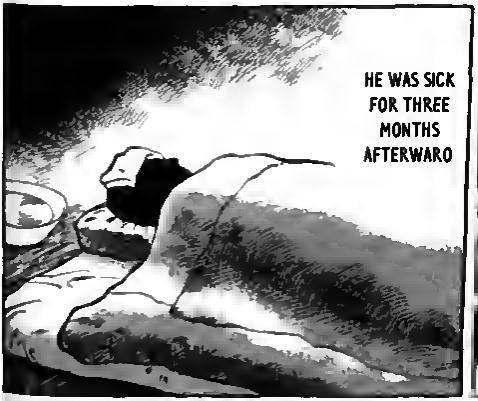
AS HE WAS LATE GETTING BACK...
HIS WIFE WENT LOOKING FOR HIM AND FOUND HIM FLOATING IN THE WATER WITH HIS MOUTH OPEN.
WHEN YOUR BODY IS HOT, IF YOU SUDDENLY THROW YOURSELF IN THE COLD WATER YOU CAN GIVE YOURSELF A HEART ATTACK.
HE WAS ALREADY DEAD.
THE Y FAMILY HAD ALSO WORKED AT MAKING CHARCOAL UNTIL TWO YEARS BEFORE.
UMMM...

NOW AND THEN HE COOLED HIS HANDS AND FACE WITH COLD WATER.


MR. Y WAS PREPARING THE FIRE ONE DAY IN THE MIDDLE OF SUMMER.


HE LOST CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE ENTRANCE OF THE KILN, AND THERE HE STAYED, CLUTCHING SOME LUMBER.

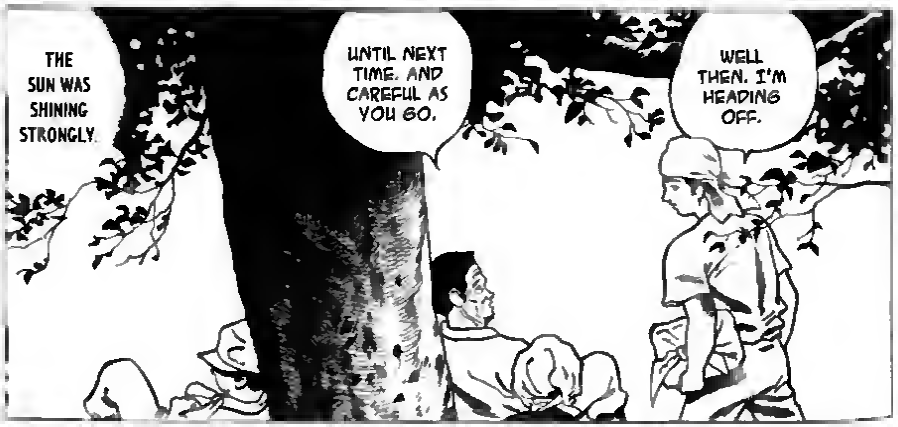
HALFWAY THROUGH THE JOB HE BEGAN TO FEEL BAD AND HIS PULSE WENT RACING.

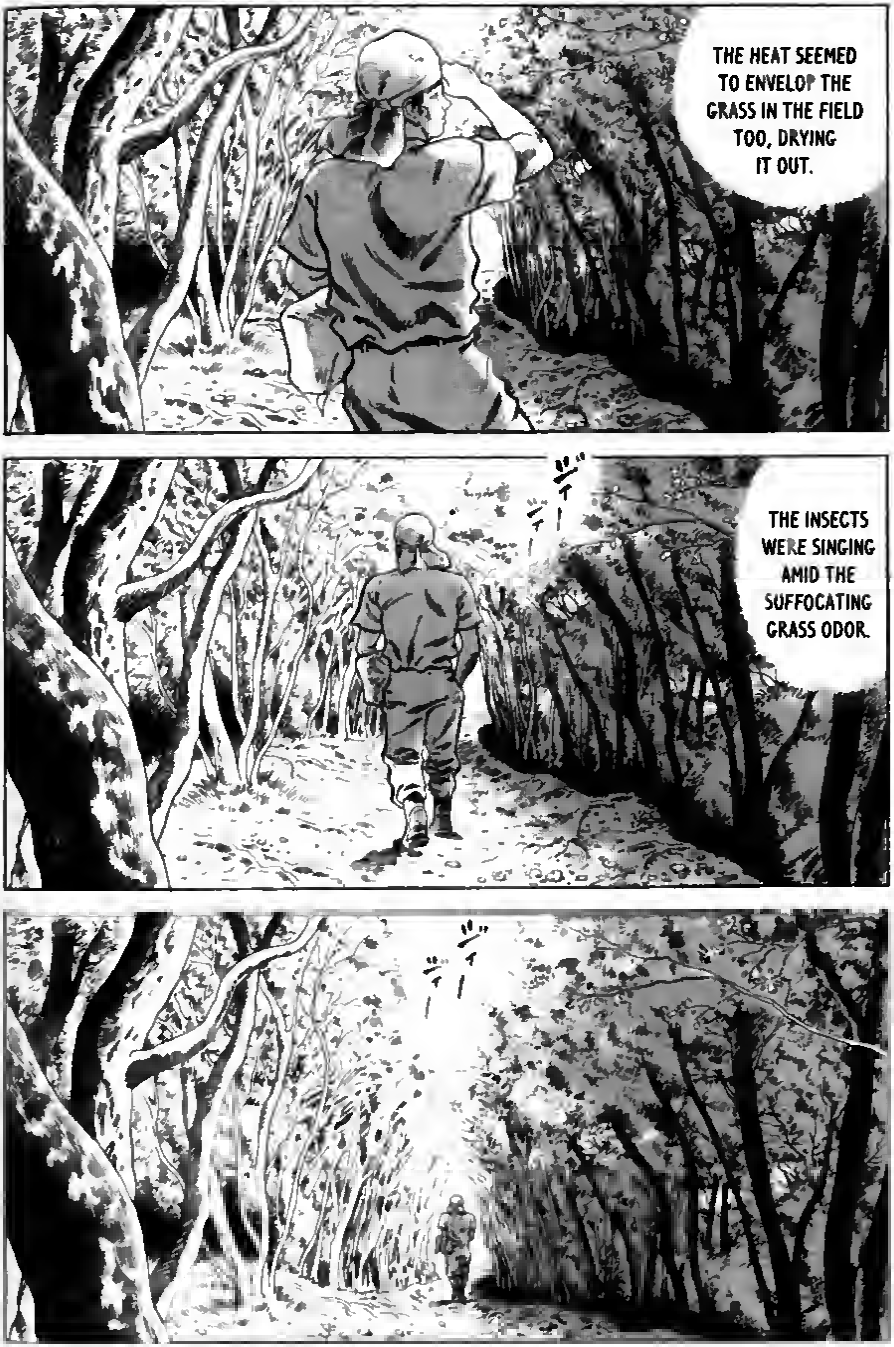

HE WAS SICK FOR THREE MONTHS AFTERWARD.

MY HUSBAND HAS ALWAYS BEEN QUITE SLENDER AND PRONE TO ILLNESS.
BECAUSE OF THIS, HE BECAME AFRAID OF WORKING AS A CHARCOAL BURNER AND QUIT.
PEOPLE LIKE HIM CAN'T TAKE LIFE IN A MOUNTAIN CABIN.
...FROM TIME TO TIME HE'D GROAN FROM BEING SHORT OF BREATH.
I ALSO NOTICED WHEN HE WAS SLEEP-ING...
THAT WOULD CALM HIM DOWN A BIT, BUT HE'D START GROANING AGAIN SHORTLY.
EVEN THOUGH I WAS DEAD TIRED, I'D START RUB-BING HIS BACK.

ONE CAN EARN GOOD MONEY MAKING CHARCOAL.
I WAS ALSO ASHAMED TO SPEND MY DAYS ON A MOUNTAIN IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE.
UMMM.
YOU EARN MONEY BUT YOU WRECK YOUR BODY.
WORKING FROM MORNING UNTIL THE SUN SETS AND THEN SPENDING MANY SLEEPLESS NIGHTS WATCHING THE FIRE.
A YOUNG MAN CAN DO IT.
BUT IT ISN'T SOMETHING YOU CAN DO TILL YOU'RE OLD.

AFTER SPENDING THREE HOURS THERE, I STARTED DOWN THE PASS TO THE VILLAGE


THE SUN WAS SHINING STRONGLY.
UNTIL NEXT TIME. AND CAREFUL AS YOU GO.
WELL THEN. I'M HEADING OFF.

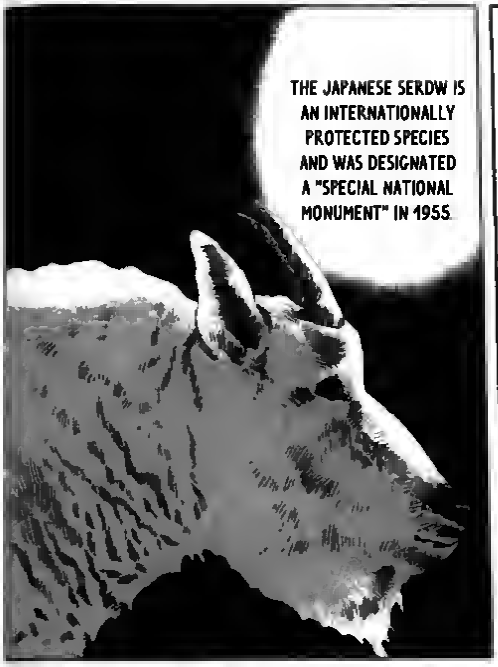

THE HEAT SEEMED TO ENVELOP THE GRASS IN THE FIELD TOO, DRYING IT OUT.
THE INSECTS WERE SINGING AMID THE SUFFOCATING GRASS ODOR.

Preparing the Fire, The End.

Chapter 5: The Supervisor

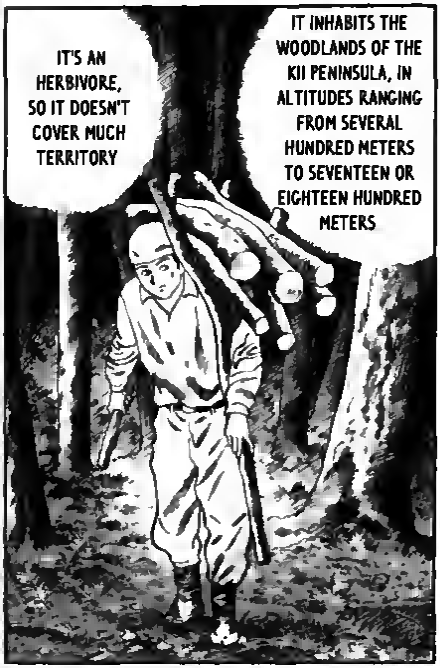
LIVING IN THE MOUNTAINS, YOU ENCOUNTER SOME ANIMAL OR ANOTHER EVERY DAY, BUT THAT DAY WAS SOMETHING SPECIAL.
OH!

WHAT IS THAT?
A WHITE SEROW ?
A SEROW ?


THE JAPANESE SERDW IS AN INTERNATIONALLY PROTECTED SPECIES AND WAS DESIGNATED A "SPECIAL NATIONAL MONUMENT" IN 1955.

THE SEROW DOESN'T BELONG TO THE DEER FAMILY, RATHER, IT IS A BOVID, LIKE THE GOAT.

WITH THE EXCEPTION OF MATING SEASON AND WHEN THEY HAVE YOUNG, THEY'RE GENERALLY SOLITARY ANIMALS.


IT'S AN HERBIVORE, SO IT DOESN'T COVER MUCH TERRITORY
IT INHABITS THE WOODLANDS OF THE KII PENINSULA, IN ALTITUDES RANGING FROM SEVERAL HUNDRED METERS TO SEVENTEEN OR EIGHTEEN HUNDRED METERS

THEY STAND OUT AMONG OTHER ANIMALS FOR THEIR ABILITY TO TRAVERSE VIRTUALLY IMPASSABLE ROUTES. THEY ARE GENUINE CLIMBING MASTERS.
ONCE THEY'VE CLIMBED ATOP A ROCK THEY USUALLY STAY THERE FOR A LONG TIME, WATCHING AND WAITING UNTIL THE PREDATOR GIVES UP.
IF THEY FEEL STALKED, THEY FLEE ALONG THE CLIFFS OR CLIMB UP THE ROCKY WALLS WHICH THEIR ENEMIES, SUCH AS DOGS FOR EXAMPLE, CANNOT SCALE.
THEY CALL THAT "THE SEROW'S CLIFFSIDE WATCH."

WHEN A SEROW DOES THIS, I JOKINGLY CALL HIM "THE SUPERVISOR."
TODAY WE KNOW THAT ALBINISM IS A PHENOMENON THAT OCCURS IN ANIMALS FROM TIME TO TIME FOR GENETIC REASONS
I DO THIS BECAUSE IT LOOKS LIKE HE'S KEEPING AN EYE ON ME WHILE I CUT FIRE-WOOD OR GO ABOUT MY TASKS.
IN THE CASE OF THE WHITE SEROW, WHICH COULD BE THE TRUE CAUSE?
BUT THE PEOPLE FROM MY AREA AND I MYSELF INNOCENTLY USED TO BELIEVE THAT IT WAS BECAUSE THE ANIMAL HAD TURNED WHITE-HAIRED FROM OLD AGE

FOR A WHILE THERE I DION'T COME ACROSS THE WHITE SUPERVISOR AGAIN.
IT SEEMS HE HAD BEEN SNARED IN A THICK WIRE TRAP IN THE BEECHWOOD THAT WAS TOWARD THE SOUTH ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MOUNTAIN AND COULDN'T MOVE
BUT AT THE END OF THAT YEAR, SHORTLY AFTER HUNTING SEASON HAD OPENED, THE WHITE SUPERVISOR HAD BEEN CAUGHT IN A TRAP
HE WAS TRYIN' TO GET LOOSE AN' HE WAS FURIOUS I TELL YA!
THE MAN WHO FOUND HIM TOLD ME HIS STORY

I TRIED TO GET CLOSE TO GET THE WIRE OFFA HIM...
HE'D MADE KINDLIN' OUTTA THE PLANTS AROUND HIM.
OH!
...BUT THEN HE STARTED SNORTIN' LIKE A DEMON AN' TRIED TO RAM ME!
LIKE THAT I MANAGED TO GET UP NEXT TO HIM AN' SET'IM LOOSE.
SO WHAT I DID WAS TOSS A HEMP ROPE ROUND HIS NECK AN' TIE HIM TO A TREE SO HE COULDN'T GET ME WITH HIS HORNS.
BUT 'FORE I COULD REACT, HE BROKE THE ROPE AN' WAS OFF LIKE HE'D BEEN SHOT OUTTA A CANNON!

HE HAD SCARS AN' CUTS ON HIS EARS AN' FACE.
I'D SAY HE'S PRETTY OLD.
HE WAS A MALE.
TO SET TRAPS YOU NEED AN "A" LICENSE, WHICH IS SEPARATE FROM THE LICENSE FOR HUNTING WITH GUNS.
THE TRAP THE SUPERVISOR FELL INTO HAO SURELY BEEN PLACED BY A POACHER.
BUT IN PRACTICE, IT'S NOT UNCOMMON FOR TRAPS TO BE PLACED AND THEN LEFT ABANDONED.
MOREOVER THERE ARE STRICT REGULATIONS FOR THAT TYPE OF HUNTING. TO SET ONE YOU NEED TO TAG IT WITH THE HUNTER'S NAME AND PICK IT UP AGAIN BEFORE THE SUN SETS.

FOR THE PEOPLE WHO LIVED IN THE MOUNTAINS, SEROW MEAT WAS AN IMPORTANT SOURCE OF ANIMAL PROTEINS, WITH A FLAVOR EVERY BIT AS GOOD AS THAT OF VENISON.
PEELING THE HORNS AND MAKING A BREW WITH THEM YIELDED A MEDICINE AGAINST BERIBERI AND FEVER.
WARMTH ENTERS YOUR BODY AS YOU EAT IT. THEY USED TO SAY IT WOULD HELP PREVENT CHILDREN FROM WETTING THE BED.
THEY USED TO SAY THE HOOVES WERE GOOD FOR NEURALGIA
AS WAS THE CASE WITH BEARS, YOU COULD MAKE USE OF PRACTICALLY THE ENTIRE SEROW.
THE BILE AND INTESTINES WERE USED FOR STOMACH ACHES.

OWING TO THIS AND THAT THEY WERE EASY TO HUNT, THERE WAS A PERIOD WHERE THEY WERE SHOT DOWN INDISCRIMINATELY

THE SEROW FOUND ITSELF CONSTANTLY PUSHED FARTHER UP THE MOUNTAINS AND SEEMED CONDEMNED TO EXTINCTION

HOWEVER, IN THE YEAR 1959...
Tanabe Police Station, Wakayama Prefecture

IT WASN'T ON ACCOUNT OF ANY TIP-OFF. IT ALL STARTED WHEN THEY DISCOVERED SEROW HIDES IN A FURRIER'S SHOP IN OKAYAMA PREFECTURE.
THEY SNIFFED OUT THE POACHING RING. MANY OF MY ACQUAINTANCES WERE INTERROGATED.
Tanabe Police Station, Wakayama Prefecture
...FROM 1956 TO 1960.
ACCORDING TO THE PAPERS, TWO THOUSAND PEOPLE WERE INTERROGATED AND SOME TWO HUNDRED WERE ARRESTED...
THEY UNCOVERED A LARGE-SCALE DISTRIBUTION NETWORK BETWEEN FURRIERS AND THE INVESTIGATION SWEPT ACROSS THE ENTIRE COUNTRY.

THANKS TO THE FURRIER'S CONFESSION, THE PEOPLE INVOLVED BEGAN TO FALL LIKE DOMINOES INTO THE HANDS OF THE POLICE.
THEY FOUND THE BODIES OF THREE HUNDRED TWENTY FOUR ANIMALS, AND THEY SAY THAT THE NUMBER OF SKINS SOLD EXCEEDED TWO THOUSAND.
ONE OF THE HUNTERS UNDER INTERROGATION WAS MR. LI.
YES, OF COURSE.
HAVE YOU HUNTED ANY SEROWS?

YOU'RE ASKING ME ABOUT THE MEAT...
WELL...
IN WHAT MOUNTAIN DID YOU HUNT THEM? HOW MANY WERE THERE?
WHAT WAS THAT!
WHY EVERY TIME I SAW ONE I SHOT IT. SO I DON'T RECALL EXACTLY HOW MANY IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN.
OH!
ばん
AFTER THE WAR WE HAD ALL BUT NOTHING TO EAT.

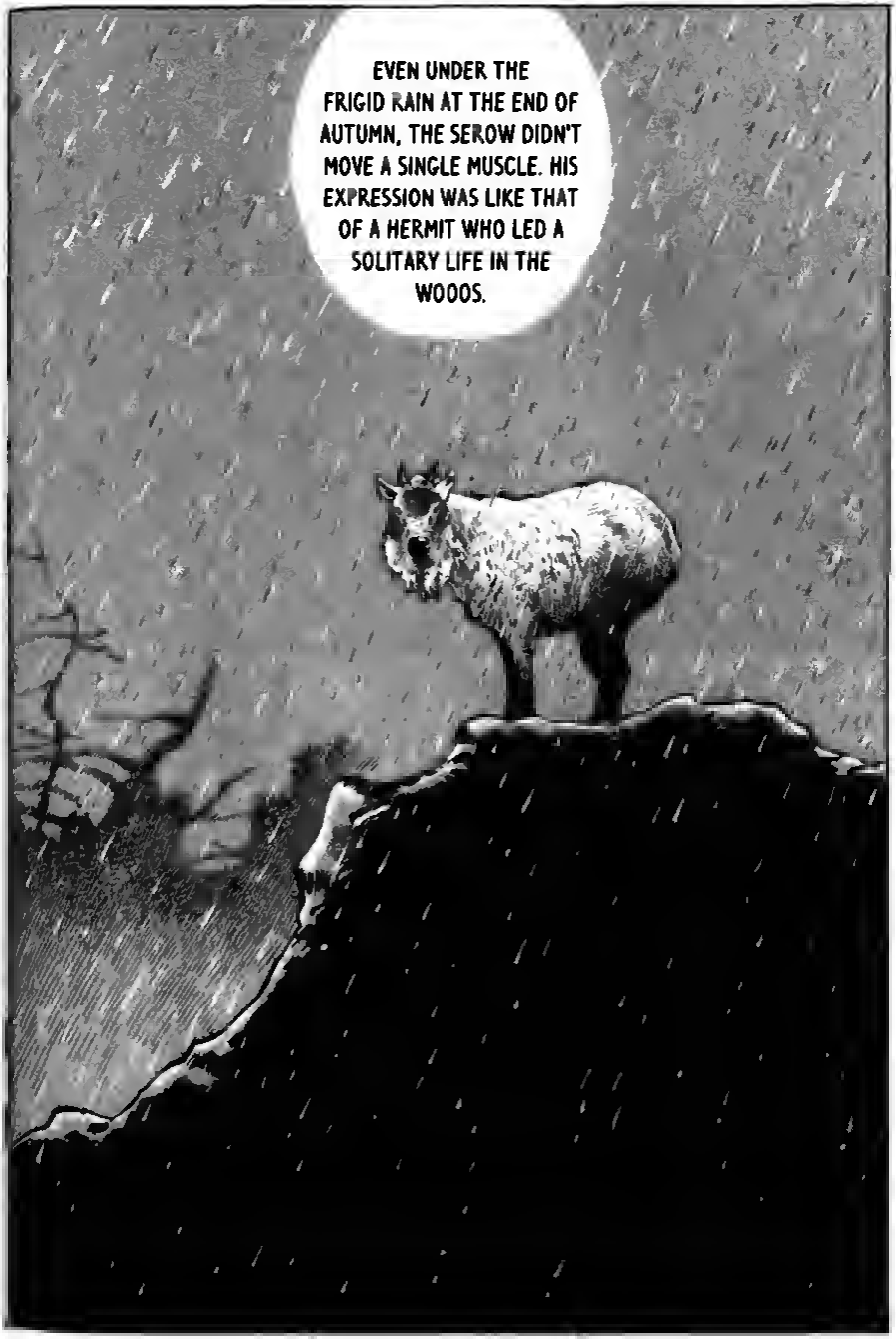
GRRR.
THANKS TO THAT MEAT I WAS ABLE TO RAISE MY CHILDREN.
IF I HADN'T BAGGED THAT MEAT I'D HAVE STARVED TO DEATH SOME TIME AGO.
MR. LI WAS A BIT ARRDGANT AT TIMES.
AS YOU COULDN'T EARN MONEY FROM IT ANY MORE, POACHING PLUNGED DRAMATICALLY.
AFTER THE "DKAYAMA CASE" THE FUR TRADERS GREW FRIGHTENED AND DIDN'T TRAFFIC IN SERDW HIDES ANY LDNGER.

YOU'RE REALLY PUTTING YOUR BACK INTO IT, EH?
HAVE YOU SEEN A WHITE SEROW IN THESE PARTS?
NO WAY!
A WHITE SEROW?

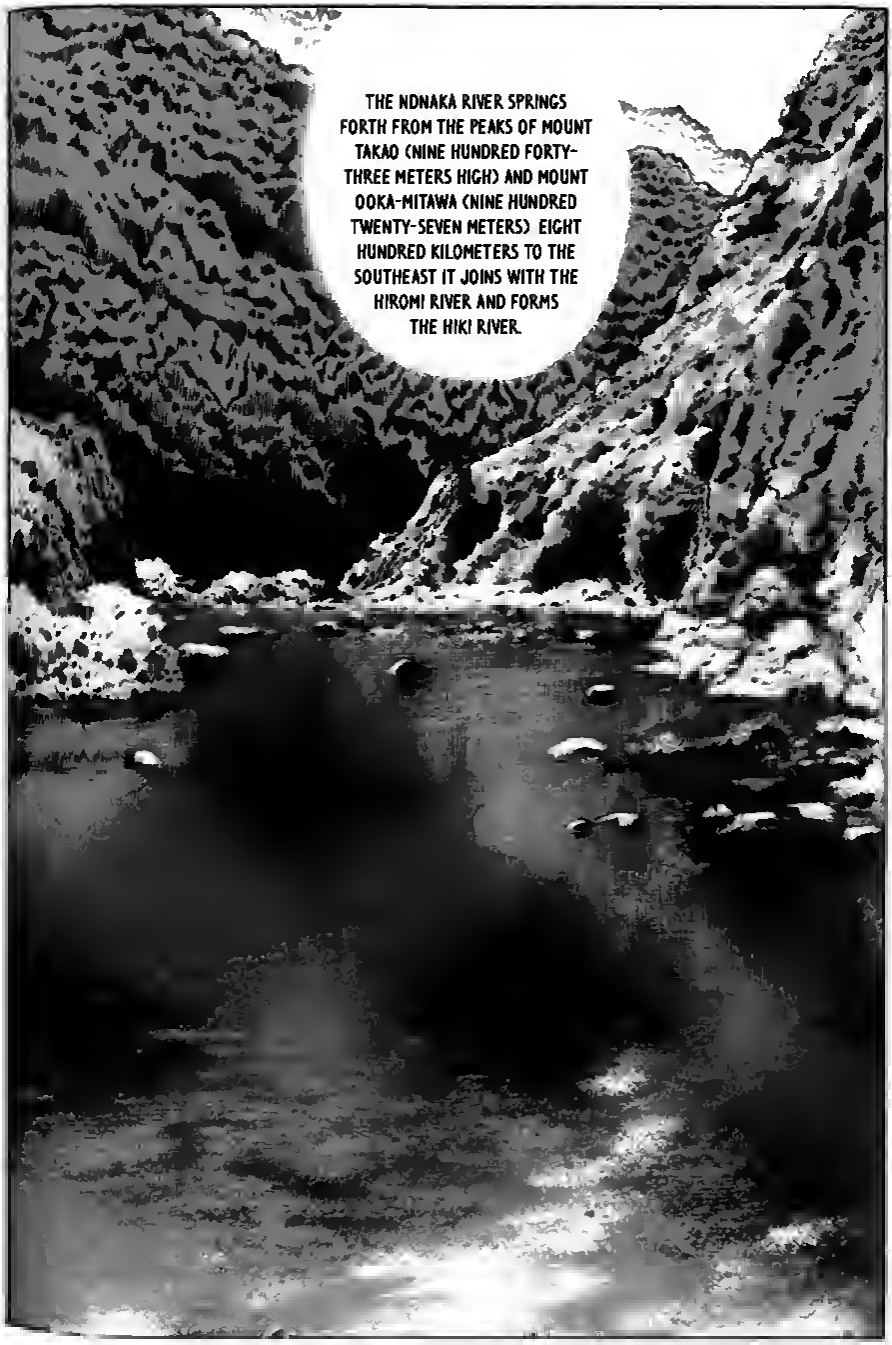
HMMM.
DAMN.
I HAVEN'T EVEN HEARD THAT THERE WAS ONE.
YOU'VE GOT IT ALL NICE AND ORGANIZED.
YOU'RE A TIDY ONE, AREN'T YA?
IF YOU SEE IT, LEMME KNOW, OKAY?
MY FATHER ALWAYS USED TO SAY THAT IF YOUR WORKPLACE IS SLOPPY IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO DO A GOOD JOB.

OH!

TH... THE SUPER-VISOR!
IF YOU STAY THERE, MR. LI WILL SPOT YOU AND SHOOT YOU.
NO, GET AWAY!
PLEASE!
GET DOWN, QUICKLY!


EVEN UNDER THE FRIGID RAIN AT THE END OF AUTUMN, THE SEROW DIDN'T MOVE A SINGLE MUSCLE. HIS EXPRESSION WAS LIKE THAT OF A HERMIT WHO LED A SOLITARY LIFE IN THE WOODS.

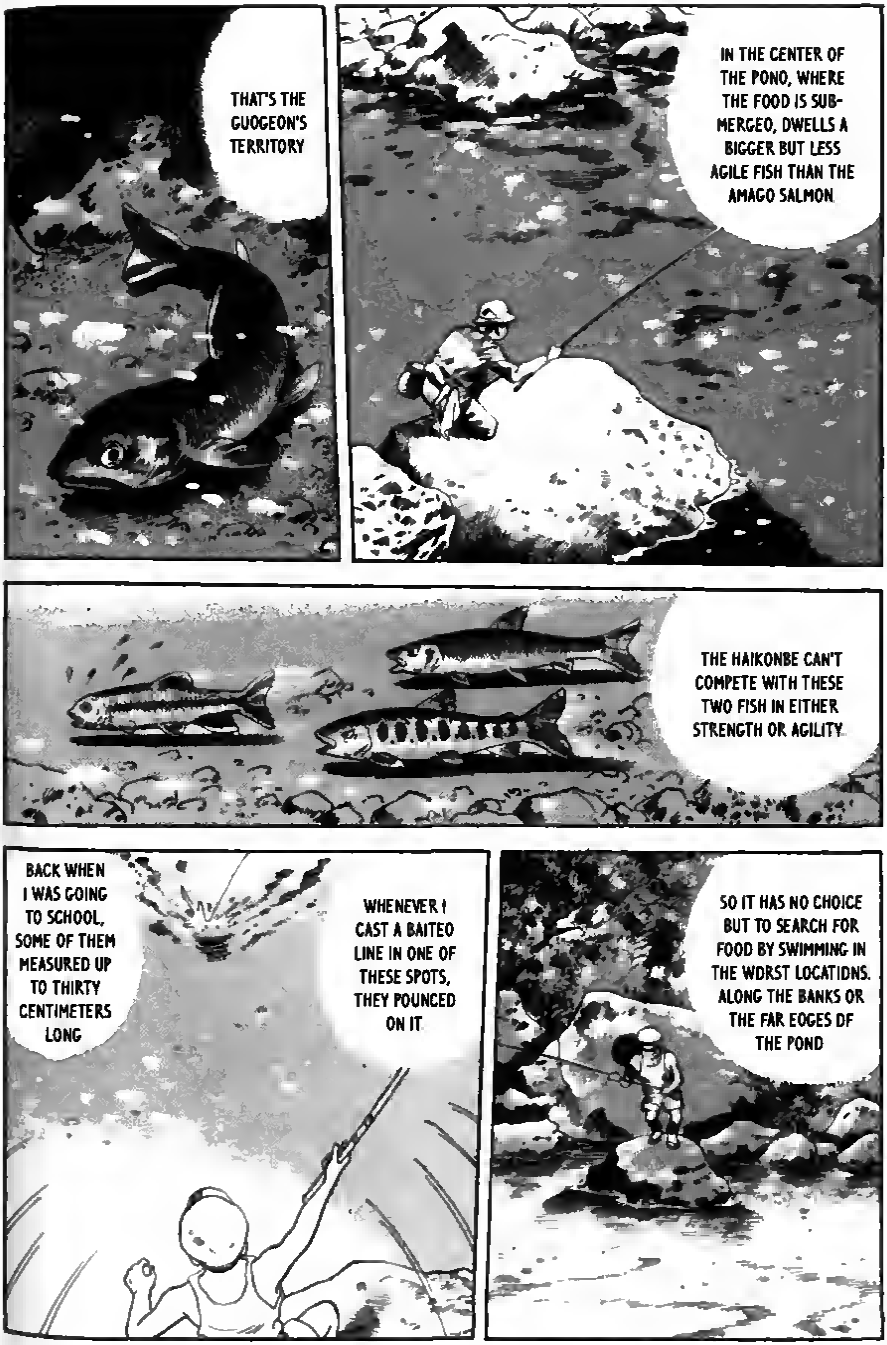
Chapter 6: The Himegani of the Zugani Pond

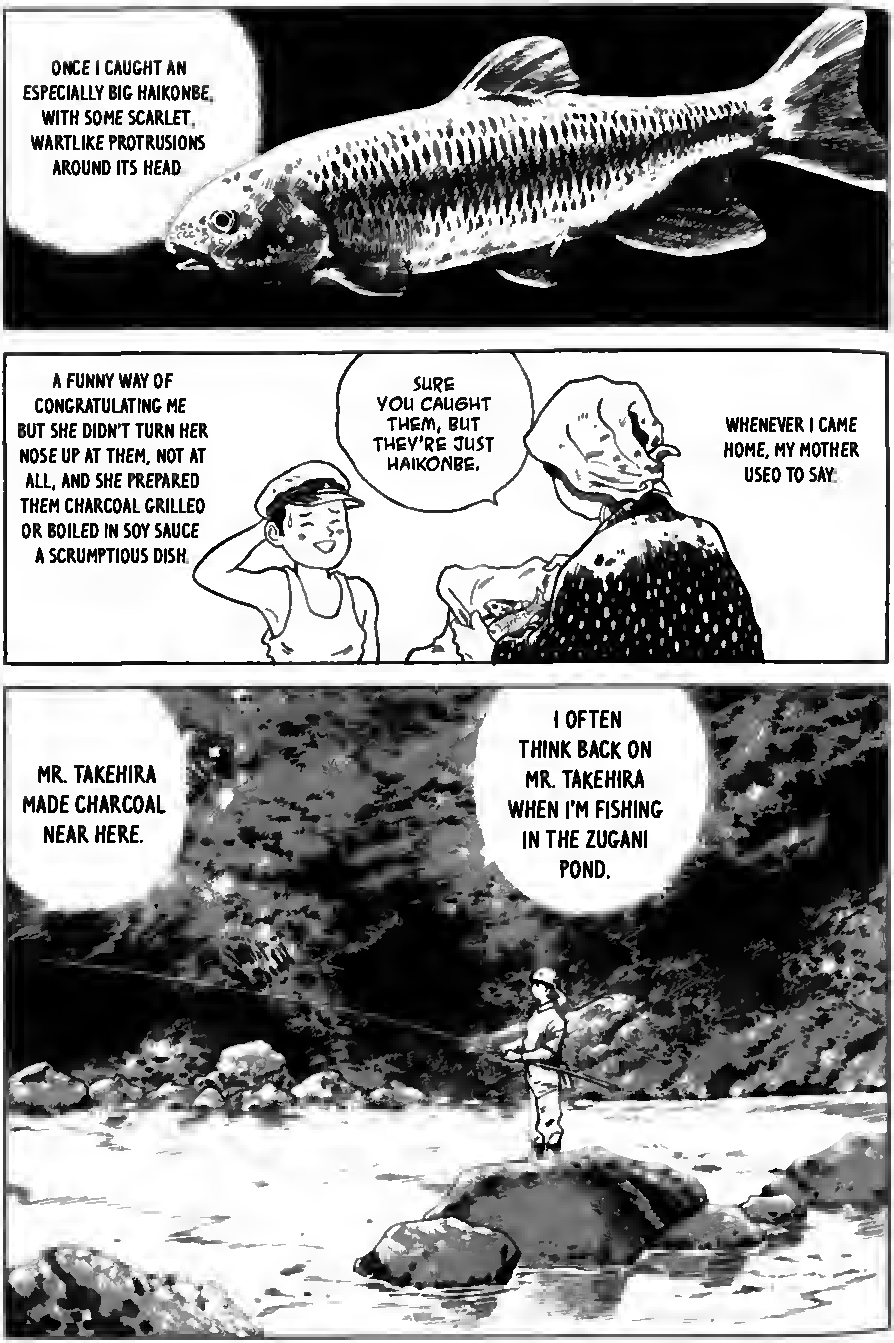

THE NDNAKA RIVER SPRINGS FORTH FROM THE PEAKS OF MOUNT TAKAO (NINE HUNDRED FORTY-THREE METERS HIGH) AND MOUNT OOKA-MITAWA (NINE HUNDRED TWENTY-SEVEN METERS). EIGHT HUNDRED KILOMETERS TO THE SOUTHEAST IT JOINS WITH THE HIROMI RIVER AND FORMS THE HIKI RIVER.

THE HIKI IS A CLASS B RIVER SYSTEM* FIVE HUNDRED SEVEN KILOMETERS LONG. IT FLOWS INTO THE PACIFIC OCEAN TO THE SOUTH OF THE KII PENINSULA
I WENT DOWNRIVER ACROSS THE CEDAR FOREST TOWARD THE LOWER COURSE, UNTIL I ARRIVED AT THE HOSOGI POND.
ABOUT THREE KILOMETERS FROM THE HIGHEST POINT OF THE RIVER LIES A FOREST WHERE NO ONE LIVES.

THE TREK IS TWENTY-FIVE HUNDRED METERS.
ALTHOUGH THERE ARE SOME RAPIDS IN MOUNTAINS COVERED BY FORESTS, EVER SINCE I WAS LITTLE I USED TO COME HERE TO PLAY IN THE RIVER.
IT'S MORE THAN TEN METERS FROM ONE SIDE TO THE OTHER. IT'S NINE METERS DEEP AT ITS DEEPEST POINT AND IS THE BIGGEST POND IN THE AREA.
BY CLIMBING A LITTLE OVER ONE HUNDRED METERS FROM THE HOSOGI POND, YOU REACH THE ZUGANI POND.

SALMON FISHERMEN DETEST THEM. THERE ARE EVEN THOSE WHO THROW'EM AGAINST A ROCK AND JUST LEAVE THEM THERE.
THEIR FLAVOR IS NOTHING TO WRITE HOME ABOUT
IN THE ZUGANI POND, YOU CAN CATCH HAIKONBE*
BUT, WHENEVER I CAUGHT ONE AS A BOY, IT WAS A LOVELY FISH IN MY EYES.
THAT'S THE STALKING GROUND OF THE AMAGO SALMON, A LARGE, RAPIDLY MOVING FISH.
THE BEST PLACE TO CAPTURE AQUATIC AND TERRESTRIAL INSECTS IS IN THE MOUTH OF THE POND.


THAT'S THE GUOGEON'S TERRITORY
IN THE CENTER OF THE POND, WHERE THE FOOD IS SUBMERGED, DWELLS A BIGGER BUT LESS AGILE FISH THAN THE AMAGO SALMON
THE HAIKONBE CAN'T COMPETE WITH THESE TWO FISH IN EITHER STRENGTH OR AGILITY
BACK WHEN I WAS GOING TO SCHOOL, SOME OF THEM MEASURED UP TO THIRTY CENTIMETERS LONG
WHENEVER I CAST A BAITED LINE IN ONE OF THESE SPOTS, THEY POUNCED ON IT
SO IT HAS NO CHOICE BUT TO SEARCH FOR FOOD BY SWIMMING IN THE WORST LOCATIONS. ALONG THE BANKS OR THE FAR EDGES OF THE POND


ONCE I CAUGHT AN ESPECIALLY BIG HAIKONBE, WITH SOME SCARLET, WARTLIKE PROTRUSIONS AROUND ITS HEAD.
A FUNNY WAY OF CONGRATULATING ME BUT SHE DIDN'T TURN HER NOSE UP AT THEM, NOT AT ALL, AND SHE PREPARED THEM CHARCOAL GRILLED OR BOILED IN SOY SAUCE A SCRUMPTIOUS DISH.
SURE YOU CAUGHT THEM, BUT THEY'RE JUST HAIKONBE.
WHENEVER I CAME HOME, MY MOTHER USED TO SAY:
MR. TAKEHIRA MADE CHARCOAL NEAR HERE.
I OFTEN THINK BACK ON MR. TAKEHIRA WHEN I'M FISHING IN THE ZUGANI POND.

IT WAS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE POST-WAR ERA WHEN I WAS GOING TO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, I'D DO ERRANDS TO EARN SOME MONEY.
I ONLY EVER SPENT ONE NIGHT IN HIS CHARCOAL BURNER CABIN
YAKIKO ARE WORKERS WHO LACK THE RESOURCES TO BUY LAND IN THE FORESTS OR TO BUILD THEIR OWN CABINS AND KILNS.
MR. TAKEHIRA WAS A YAKIKO.
IN THE END, IT'S THE OWNER WHO SELLS THE CHARCOAL.
THEY WORK FOR PAY UNDER A LANDOWNER, AND RECEIVE A SUM OF MONEY DETERMINED BY EACH BALE OF CHARCOAL.

MY FATHER WAS VERY BUSY WITH HIS POSITION AS HEAD OF THE DISTRICT AND AS A MEMBER OF THE VILLAGE ASSEMBLY, SO HE LEFT THE WORK OF CUTTING TREES AND PREPARING THE CHARCOAL TO A YAKIKO
THE OWNER WAS MY FATHER.
HE USED TO WORK THERE, ALL BY HIS LONESOME, PREPARING THE CHARCOAL
MR. TAKEHIRA WAS ABOUT FIFTY YEARS OLD, WITH A FRAIL APPEARANCE AND WARM CHARACTER.
THAT DAY HE MADE UDON NOODLES AND INVITED ME TO JOIN HIM
だんだんだん

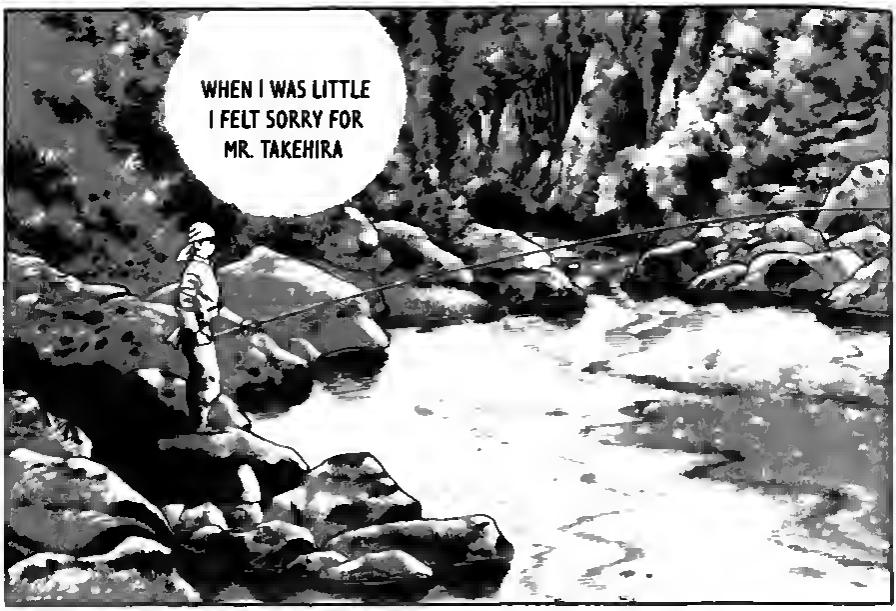
I STILL REMEMBER HOW HE MADE A CAMP FIRE ON THE CABIN FLOOR AND SCATTERED AROUND THE LEFTOVER ASHES TO HEAT THE ROOM.
THEY WERE SIMPLE, HANDMADE AND COOKED IN THE TRADITIONAL WAY.
AND HAD HIME-GANI* WITH IT AS AN APPETIZER.
BY AND BY, MR. TAKEHIRA BEGAN DRINKING SAKE.

EH...
ぱくぱく
ぱく
NOT TO YOUR LIKING?
ぱくぱく
IT'S JUST...
WHAT'S THE MATTER, TOSHIKATSU? NOT EATING TONIGHT?
I COULDN'T STOP LOOKING ON IN DISGUST AS MR. TAKEHIRA CHOMPED NOISILY AWAY.
AT THAT MOMENT I COULON'T EVEN TRY A NIBBLE.

WELL...
MR. TAKEHIRA, DON'T YOU FEEL LONELY?
IT WAS WINTER, AND THE WIND WAS BLOWING INTO THE ANCIENT CABIN WITHOUT A SHRED OF PITY.
OF COURSE I DO.
AT NIGHT LISTEN TO THE NO RIVER AND IT SEEMS TO SOUND LIKE A PERSON'S VOICE.
A HAIKU JUST OCCURRED TO ME. WANNA HEAR IT?
AH, BY THE WAY...

HA, HA, HA...
HEE, HEE...
HUH?
SOUNDING LIKE THE VOICE...
THE SHOWERY NIGHT
I SEARCH AMONG MY OLD MEMORIES FOR THAT POEM MR. TAKEHIRA RECITED TO ME.
HMM.
COME ON!
AH!

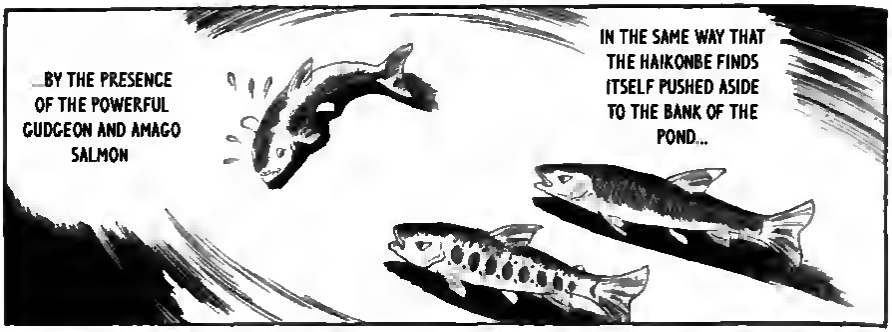
WOW, A GUDGEON.
A HIMEGANI.

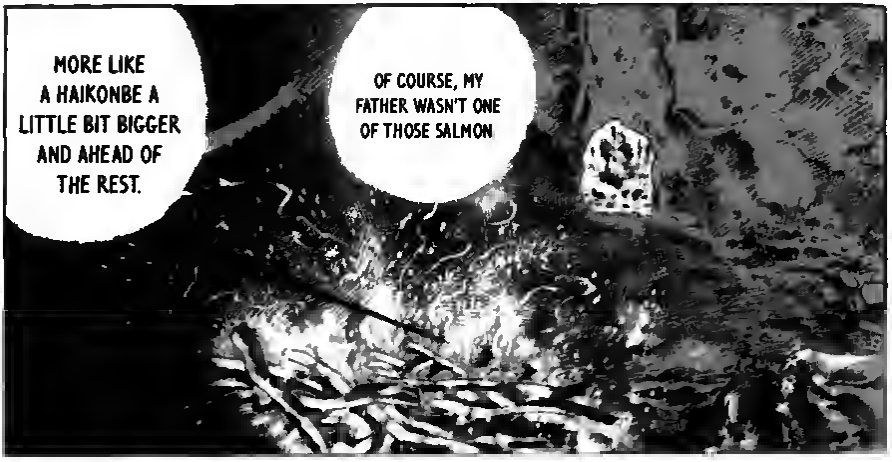

WHEN I WAS LITTLE I FELT SORRY FOR MR. TAKEHIRA

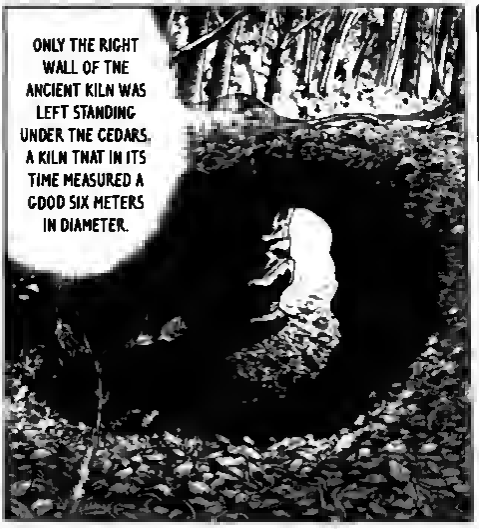
LIKE WHEN HE TIMIDLY WENT BEFORE MY FATHER TO ASK FOR A LOAN.

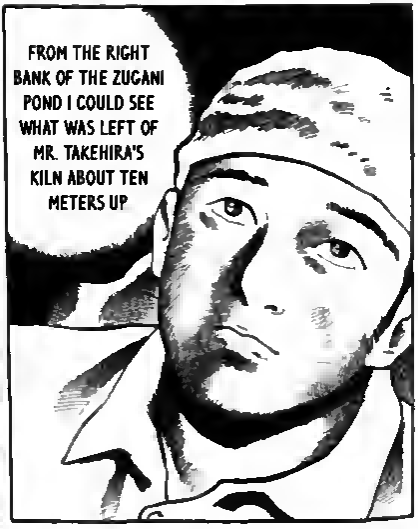
HIS FOOD, HIS CLOTHES, HIS TOOLS, HE RECEIVES ALL THAT FROM THE OWNER.
A YAKIKO HARDLY HAS MORE THAN WHAT HE WAS BORN WITH.

FREQUENTLY THIS LEAVES THE YAKIKO IN THE RED.
TWICE A YEAR, AT NEW YEAR'S AND OBON, THE FESTIVAL EXPENSES ARE DEDUCTED FROM THE CHARCOAL'S GOING RATE.
SO WHEN THE YAKIKO NEEOS MONEY, NE NAS TO BOW HIS HEAO ANO ASK TNE OWNER FOR AN AOVANCE.
THE OWNERS UNILATERALLY ESTABLISH LOW PRICES SO THINGS WILL STAY LIKE THIS.
IN THIS WIOE WORLO, THERE ARE STILL PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN SOLITUOE IN THE MOUNTAINS, EXPLOITEO ANO OOING EXNAUSTING WORK TO BOOT.


...BY THE PRESENCE OF THE POWERFUL GUDGEON AND AMAGO SALMON
IN THE SAME WAY THAT THE HAIKONBE FINDS ITSELF PUSHED ASIDE TO THE BANK OF THE POND...


MORE LIKE A HAIKONBE A LITTLE BIT BIGGER AND AHEAD OF THE REST.
OF COURSE, MY FATHER WASN'T ONE OF THOSE SALMON


ONLY THE RIGHT WALL OF THE ANCIENT KILN WAS LEFT STANDING UNDER THE CEDARS. A KILN THAT IN ITS TIME MEASURED A GOOD SIX METERS IN DIAMETER.


FROM THE RIGHT BANK OF THE ZUGANI POND I COULD SEE WHAT WAS LEFT OF MR. TAKEHIRA'S KILN ABOUT TEN METERS UP

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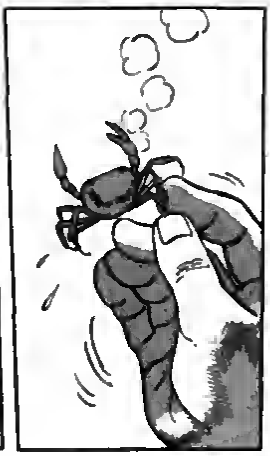

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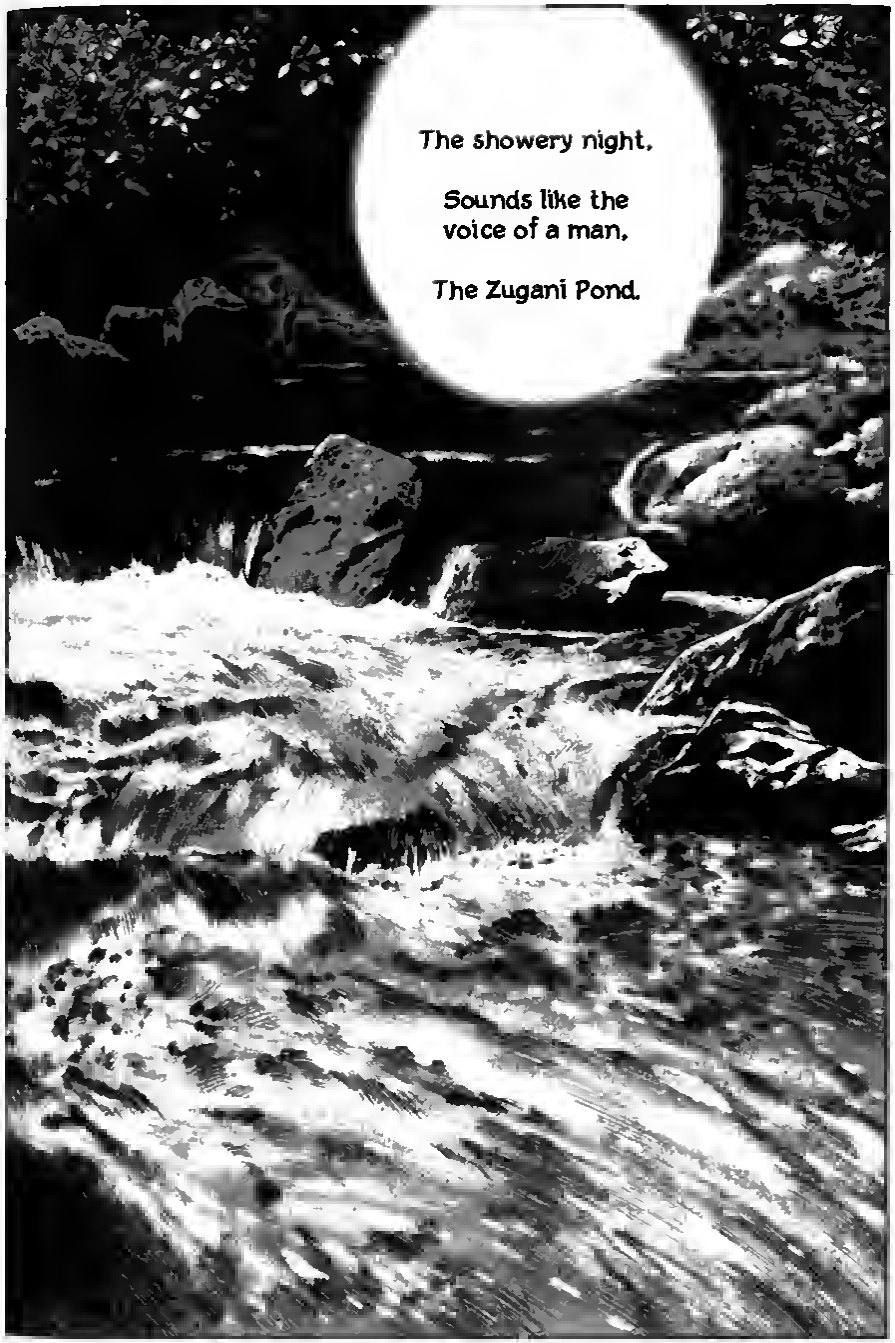
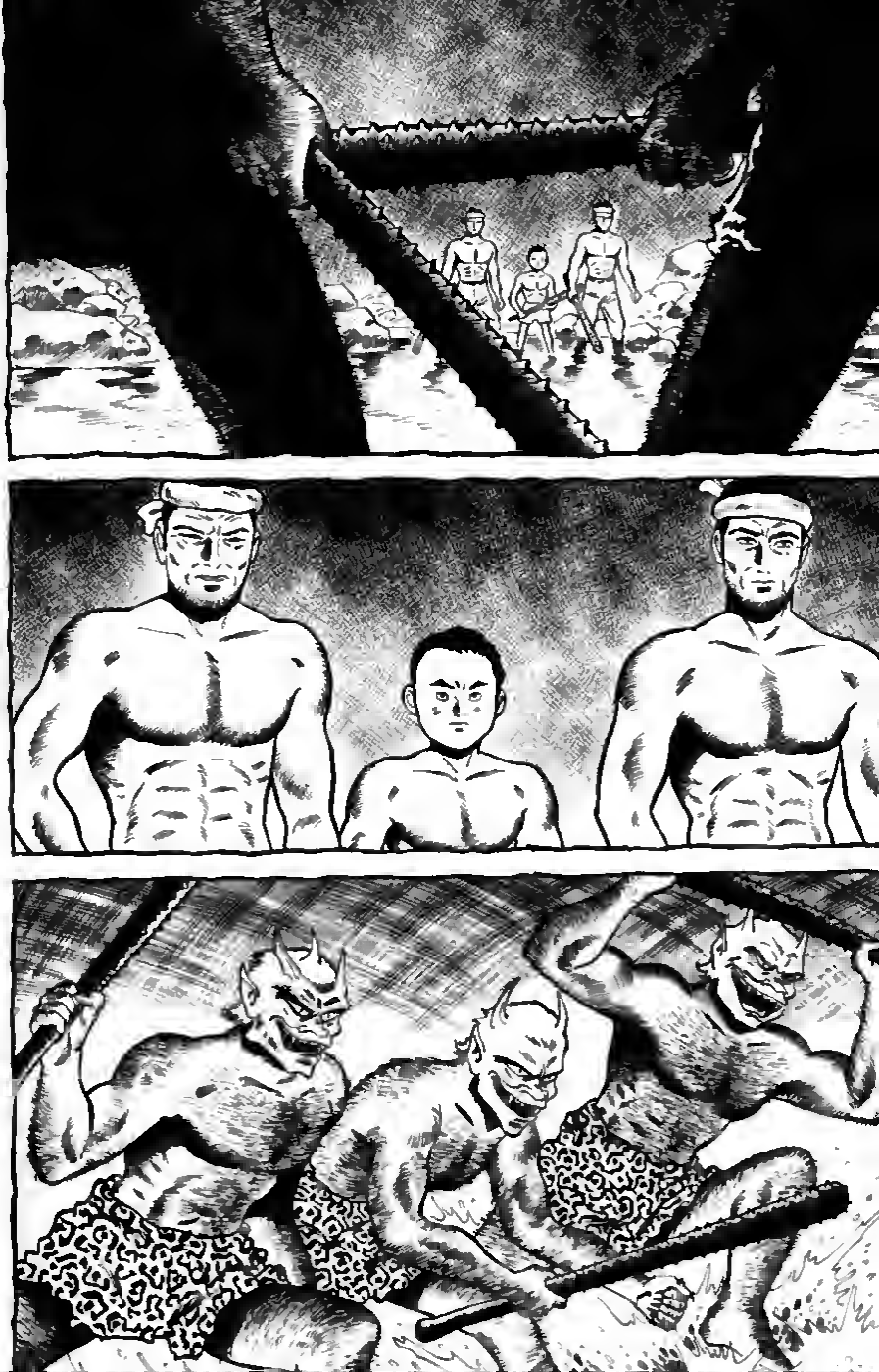
グッ

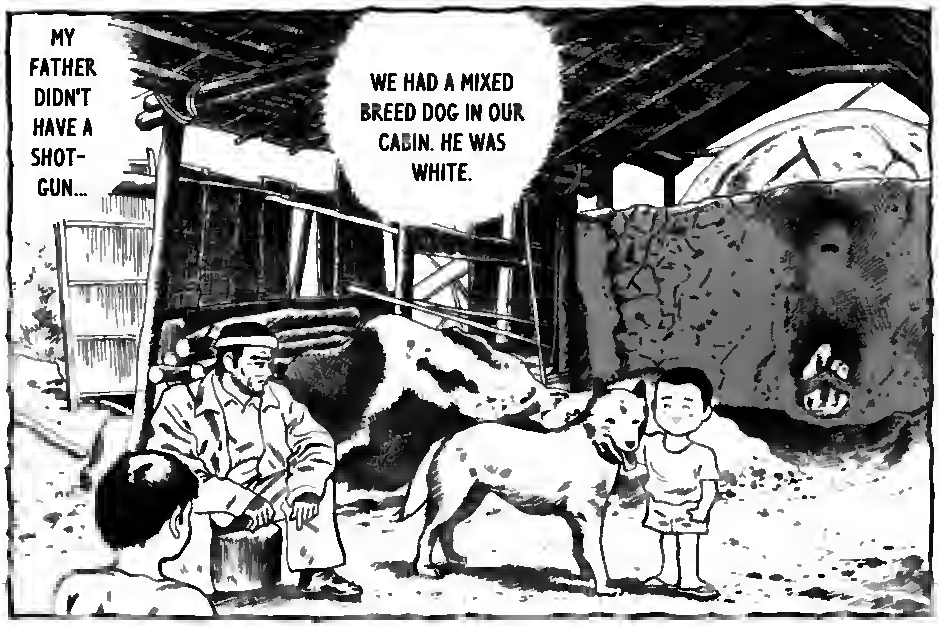
SOME-
THING
THIS
GOOD..
ぱ"
ぱ"
MMM.
DELI-
CIOUS.
ぱ"
ぱ"
WHY
COULDN'T
I EAT IT
BACK
THEN?
ALTHOUGH HE
DIDN'T HAVE ANY
KIND OF LITERARY
EDUCATION, MR.
TAKEHIRA LEFT
THIS HAIKU...


The showery night,
Sounds like the voice of a man,
The Zugani Pond.

Chapter 7: The Thrush



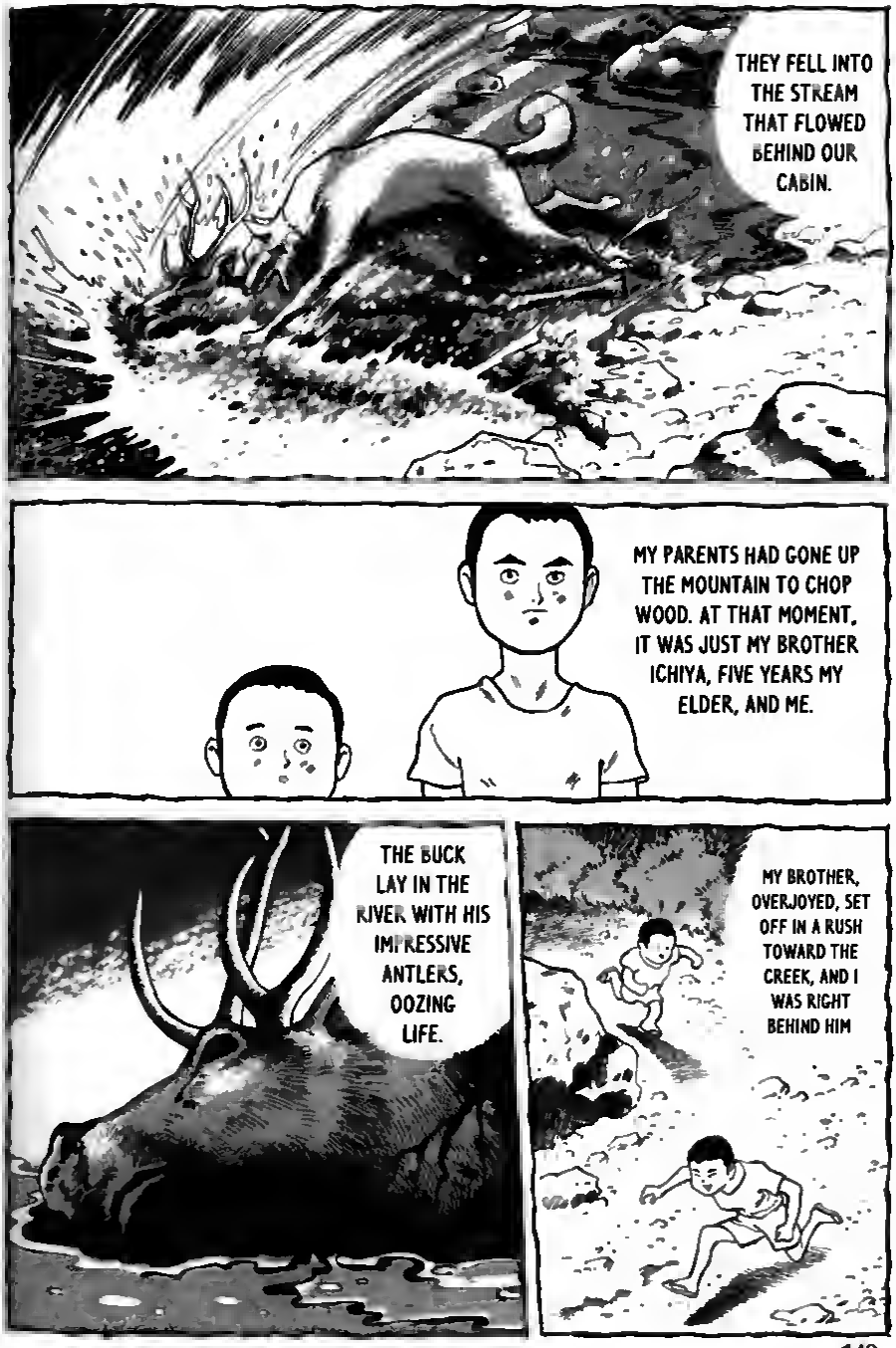
AAAH...
THAT NIGHTMARE AGAIN...
BACK THEN WE WERE MAKING CHARCOAL NEAR THE SHITAKIDANI, A TRIBUTARY OF THE KUMANO RIVER.
THIS IS A STORY FROM WHEN I WAS THREE OR FOUR YEARS OLD.


MY FATHER DIDN'T HAVE A SHOT-GUN...
WE HAD A MIXED BREED DOG IN OUR CABIN. HE WAS WHITE.

YET WHENEVER WE TOOK HIM TO THE MOUNTAIN, HE TRANSFORMED, AS IF BY MAGIC, INTO AN HONEST TO GOODNESS HUNTING DOG

...AND WE HADN'T TRAINED THE DOG AT ALL...

ONE DAY HE ATTACKED A DEER THAT HAD COME RUNNING DOWN A BLUFF.

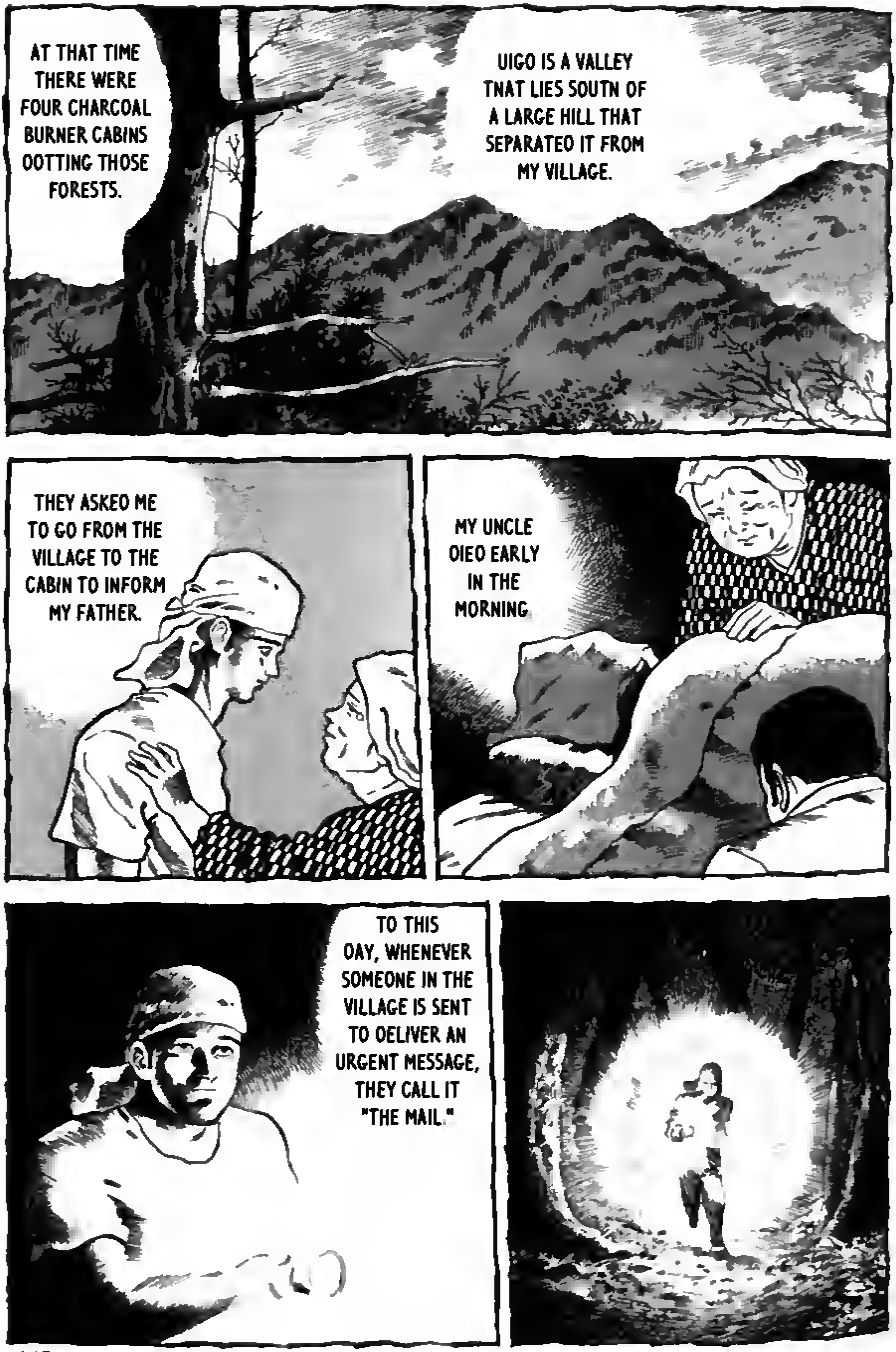

THEY FELL INTO THE STREAM THAT FLOWED BEHIND OUR CABIN.
MY PARENTS HAD GONE UP THE MOUNTAIN TO CHOP WOOD. AT THAT MOMENT, IT WAS JUST MY BROTHER ICHIYA, FIVE YEARS MY ELDER, AND ME.
THE BUCK LAY IN THE RIVER WITH HIS IMPRESSIVE ANTLERS, OOZING LIFE.
MY BROTHER, OVERJOYED, SET OFF IN A RUSH TOWARD THE CREEK, AND I WAS RIGHT BEHIND HIM

JUST THEN, TWO HUNTERS WHO HAD BEEN PURSUING THE DEER SHOWED UP BEARING RIFLES.
THE DOG WOULDN'T LET GO OF IT.
WITHOUT A GLANCE IN OUR DIRECTION, THEY WENT STRAIGHT TO THE DOG AND TRIED TO MAKE HIM RELEASE HIS PREY.
BAS-TARD!
GRRR
AAAINK

THE HUNTERS PUMMELED THE DOG.
TAKE THIS!
THEN THEY TRUSSED THE DEER'S LEGS ABOUT A POLE AND MADE OFF WITH IT ON THEIR SHOULDERS
THEY DID WHAT!?
WHEN MY FATHER CAME HOME AND WE TOLD HIM WHAT HAD HAPPENED, HE FLEW INTO A RAGE.

HE SAID THAT THEY HAD BRAWLED WITH THE HUNTERS.
HE CAME BACK HOME LATE INTO THE EVENING, HIS FACE FLUSHED FROM BOOZE.
MY FATHER AND MY UNCLE WENT MARCHING OFF TO, AS THEY PUT IT, "HAVE A CHAT" WITH THE HUNTERS.
THAT WAS WHAT HE TOLD US.
I SNATCHED UP A BEAM FROM THE LUMBER CART AND GAVE THEM A BEATING.
THAT NIGHT I HEARD A CRY IN THE MOUNTAIN.
JUST IMAGINING THE SCENE WAS ENOUGH TO GIVE ME GOOSEBUMPS.

AS IT WAS BACK WHEN I WAS STILL A BOY, I DIDN'T KNOW WHERE THAT VOICE WAS COMING FROM.
IT WAS A MACABRE AND MELANCHOLY SOUND THAT SEEMED TO RISE UP FROM WITHIN THE EARTH ITSELF.
THE NEXT TIME I HEARD THAT SOUND WAS THE NIGHT MY UNCLE DIED.
THIS HAPPENED IN THE PERIOD WHEN I WAS WORKING WITH MY FATHER AT A CHARCOAL OVEN IN UIGO.


AT THAT TIME THERE WERE FOUR CHARCOAL BURNER CABINS DOTTING THOSE FORESTS.
UIGO IS A VALLEY TNAT LIES SOUTN OF A LARGE HILL THAT SEPARATED IT FROM MY VILLAGE.
THEY ASKED ME TO GO FROM THE VILLAGE TO THE CABIN TO INFORM MY FATHER.
MY UNCLE DIED EARLY IN THE MORNING
TO THIS DAY, WHENEVER SOMEONE IN THE VILLAGE IS SENT TO DELIVER AN URGENT MESSAGE, THEY CALL IT "THE MAIL."

BUT ACCUSTOMED AS I WAS TO CROSSING THESE PATHS EVERY DAY, I ASSUMED IT WOULDN'T BE ANY TROUBLE FOR ME AND LEFT WITHOUT A SECOND THOUGHT.
EVERYONE SAYS IT'S NOT A GOOD IDEA TO GO ALONE AT NIGHT.
AND IF IT'S BECAUSE SOMEONE HAS DIED, THEY CALL IT "THE DEATH'S MAIL."
IN THOSE DAYS, THE PART OF THE MOUNTAIN THE VILLAGE OCCUPIED WAS A DENSE CEDAR FOREST.
CROSSING THE HILL TO THE CABIN WAS A ONE HOUR TRIP.

I WENT UP THE MOUNTAIN WITN MY FLASHLIGHT AS I USUALLY OIO.
HALFWAY UP, I HEARD THAT SOUND AGAIN.
AT THAT MOMENT I BECAME VERY UNEASY.
I FELT A SHIVER RUN TNROUGN ME ANO MY HAIR STOOO ON ENO.

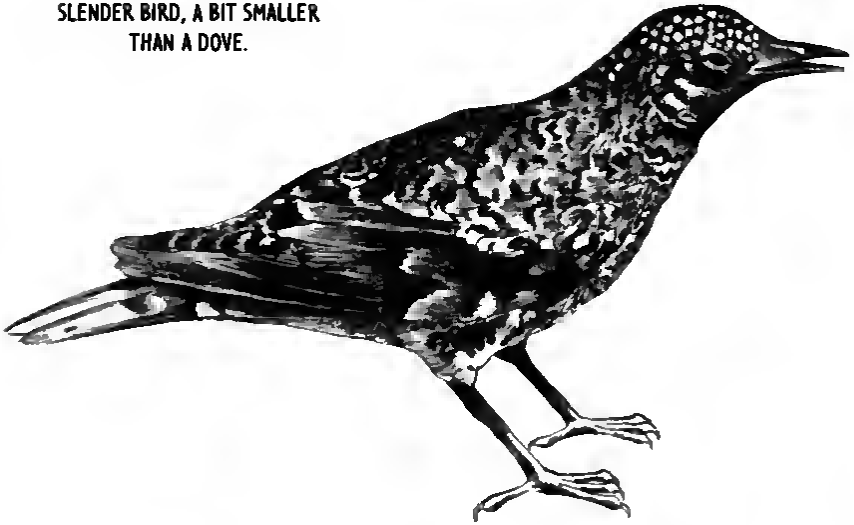
THERE WASN'T A HINT OF WIND IN THE FOREST. THE ONLY THING I HEARD IN THE FOREST GLOOM WAS THAT SOUND, OVER AND OVER AGAIN.
MY HEART WAS RACING FROM TNE MEMORIES OF MY UNCLE'S OEATN STILL FRESH IN MY MINO
IT CROSSEO MY TNOUGHTS THAT IT COULO BE MY UNCLE'S SPIRIT
ANOTHER REASON FOR MY JITTERS WAS THAT BACK THEN I STILL OION'T KNOW WHERE THAT SOUNO CAME FROM

THE WEAK VOICE CAME FROM THE DISTAHCE. IT ALMOST SEEMEO AS IF IT WERE CHASIHG ME.
THAT NIGHT MY FATHER WAS PREPARIHG CHARCOAL AS WELL, TAKIHG A NAP FROM TIME TO TIME.
WHEN I CROSSEO THE HILL FROM THE SIOE OF THE VALLEY, I SAW THE LIGHT FROM THE OVEN AND CALMEO OOWN.
AS WE ALL KNEW MY UNCLE WAS DYING...

...MY FATHER KNEW WHAT HAD HAPPENED JUST FROM SEEING ME.

ON KII PENINSULA THE THRUSH LIVES IN THE FORESTS SEVEN OR EIGHT HUNDRED METERS ABOVE SEA LEVEL AND HIGHER. IT'S A SLENDER BIRD, A BIT SMALLER THAN A DOVE.

THE SOURCE OF THAT SOUND WAS NONE OTHER THAN A THRUSH.



THE THRUSH MOST COMMONLY SINGS BETWEEN MARCH AND APRIL.
IT WAS AT THE CRACK OF DAWN. I HEARD THAT SOUND AND SET OFF TOWARD THE MOUNTAIN BEHIND MY CABIN
I'VE ONLY MANAGED TO SEE ONE SING ONCE
ALTHOUGH IT WAS AT THE END OF APRIL, AT NIGHT THE FOREST LOOKED AS DESOLATE AS IT DOES IN WINTER.
THE SKY WAS QUITE CLEAR AND THE MOON WAS JUST STARTING TO DISAPPEAR.

BUT AS I COULDN'T SEE ANYTHING, I CALLED TO IT.
AND THEN, ALL OF A SUDDEN, FROM THE CROWN OF A NEARBY TREE...
I WENT UP THE MOUNTAIN RIDGE, FOLLOWING THAT SONG...
TWEEEOO
TWEEEET
AND THEN, IN THE MOONLIT SKY...
HOOO

...THE SILHOUETTE OF THE THRUSH CAME INTO VIEW.

Chapter 8:
Our Hunting Diary (Part 1)

ONE MORNING T INVITED ME TO GO HUNTING. WE MADE OUR PREPARATIONS AND WENT LOOKING FOR FUJIO.
WHEN I SAY "WE" I'M REFERRIHG TO T, A CHILDHOOD FRIEND WHO LIVEO CLOSE BY ANO WHO HAO RECENTLY GOT HIS FIREARMS ANO HUHTIHG LICEHSE, AND ME.
WE USEO TO JOKINGLY CALL FUJIO "CHIEF" OR "CAPTAIH."

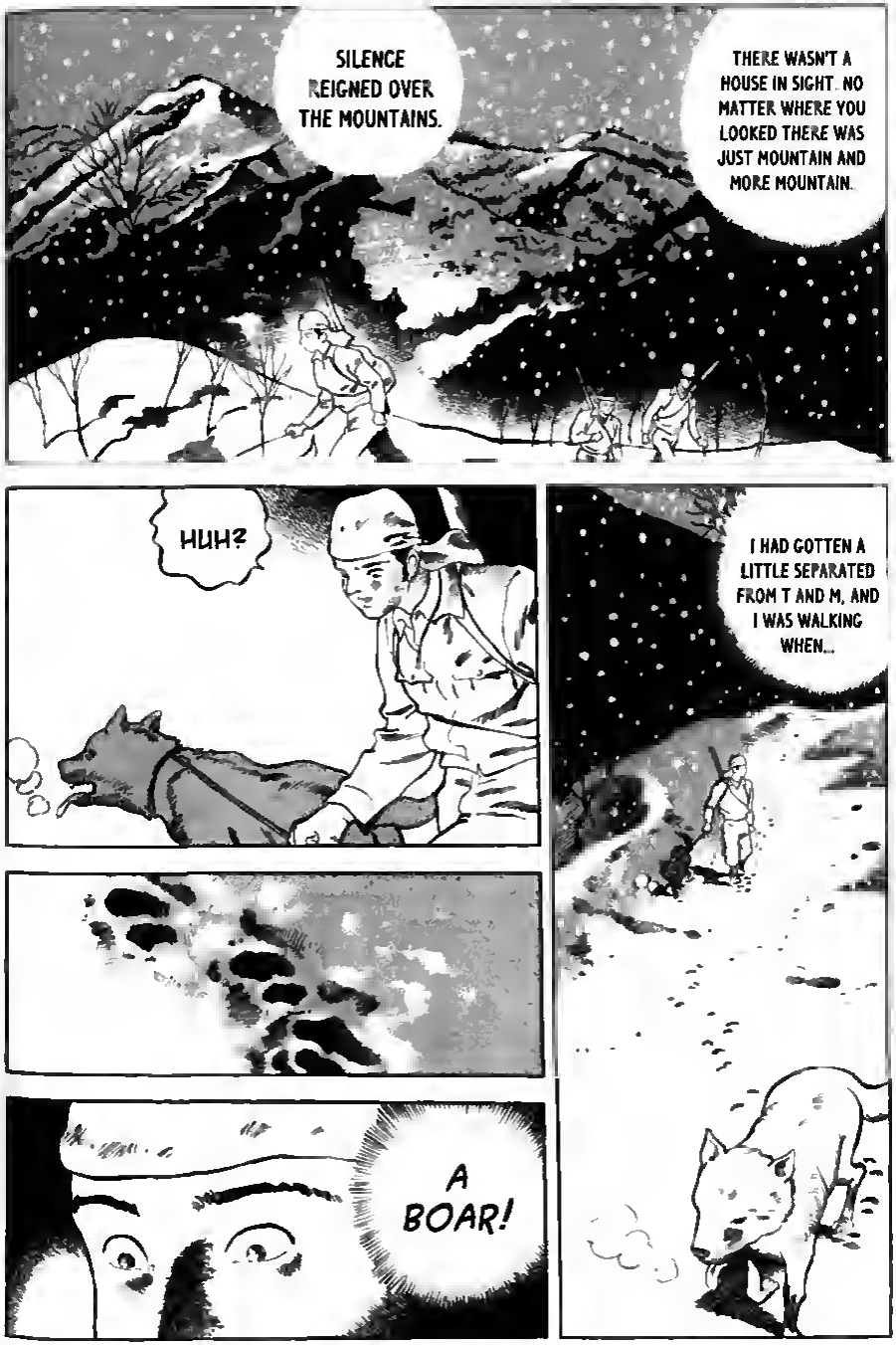
COME IN, COME IN...
HOWDY.
HEY!

HEE, HEE, HEE, HEE.
CHIEF FUJIO WAS OVER FORTY YEARS OLO ANO HAO LONG BEEN A SEASONEO HUNTER.
DON'T BE SILLY...
WHO DO YOU THINK HAS A BETTER ASS, THIS WOMAN OR MY WIFE?
FUJIO HAO SUFFEREO AN INJURY ANO NAON'T WORKEO FOR SOME TIME.
HEH.
ARE YOU GONNA DRAG A SICK OLD MAN LIKE ME UP MOUNT SHISHI?
LOOKS LIKE IT'S GONNA SNOW AGAIN... YOU GONNA GO ANYWAYS?
OUR HUNTING PARTY CONSISTEO OF SIX MEN ANO SIX OOGS

FUJIO WAS RATHER SHORT OF STATURE. HE WAS WEARING A WORN-OUT LEATHER JACKET AND A HAT THAT WAS PRACTICALLY FALLING TO PIECES FOR THE COLD.
THEY WERE HELD TOGETHER USING A PIECE OF WIRE.
HIS HUNTING RIFLE WAS OLD TOO. THE BARREL HAD COME APART FROM THE FORESTOCK.
MR. Y WAS SOLIDLY BUILT AND WORE GLASSES. HE WAS THE SAME AGE AS FUJIO AND LIKE HIM HAD MANY SUCCESSFUL HUNTS UNDER HIS BELT.

HIS DOG, ICHI, HAD A REDDISH COAT AND WAS HARDIER THAN THE OTHERS.
THE YOUNG DOGS WERE RUNNING AROUND UNTETHERED, SOMETIMES PUSHING AHEAD AND AT OTHERS FALLING BEHIND.
THE DOGS THAT WERE ON A LEASH WOULD GIVE IT A STRONG PULL NOW AND AGAIN
BUT HE WAS LAME.
HE TRIED TO APPROACH MY DOG, TANI.
ICHI, THE REDDISH DOG, WAS WHIMPERING.

AFTER CROSSING THE PEAK THE PARTY WAS DIVIDED INTO GROUPS OF THREE.
WE'D TAKE THE DOGS AND FLUSH OUT THE GAME.
THE YOUNG MEN, M, T AND I.
...AND WAIT FOR THEM THERE.
FUJIO, Y AND S WOULD POSITION THEMSELVES IN A SPOT WHERE THE ANIMALS WERE LIKELY TO RUN OFF TO—


SILENCE REIGNED OVER THE MOUNTAINS.
THERE WASN'T A HOUSE IN SIGHT. NO MATTER WHERE YOU LOOKED THERE WAS JUST MOUNTAIN AND MORE MOUNTAIN.
HUH?
I HAD GOTTEN A LITTLE SEPARATED FROM T AND M, AND I WAS WALKING WHEN...
A BOAR!

IT WAS FRESH, FROM THAT MORNING OR THE PREVIOUS NIGHT AT MOST.
THE TRAIL WENT UP TOWARD THE HEART OF THE CEDAR FOREST.

ICHI HAO ALSO FOUND THE TRAIL.

WOOF WOOF WOOF

LET'S GO, ICHI!
I DON'T KNOW WHAT KIND OF GAME IT MIGHT BE.
GO GET IT!
FUJIO AND THE OTHERS IN POSITION THERE CAN SHOOT IT.
IF IT'S A DEER, IF I CAN MAKE IT GO DOWN TOWARD THE VALLEY...

OR PERHAPS IT'LL TURN AROUND AND HEAD UP THIS WAY.
YOWCH!
IF IT'S A BOAR, IT'LL RUN ALONG THE SIDE OF THE MOUNTAIN
HOWEVER...
THAT'S OUR JOB AS THE ONES FLUSHING OUT THE GAME
HMMM.
THE DOGS STOPPED BARKING.

HEY!
A FRICKIN' BOAR!
WHAT WAS IT?
...CHANGED DIRECTIONS AGAIN AND I LOST MY FOOTING.
YEAH... AS IT WAS COMING THIS WAY IT LOOKED SLOW.
DID YOU SEE IT?
THEN THE DAMN THING...
WHEN IT WENT SCURRYING DOWN THE SLOPE I RAN AFTER IT.

I THINK IT CROSSED THE HIGASHINOKAWA.
WHERE DID IT GO?
HEY!
ヒィィィィィィ
THEY'LL CATCH UP SOON.
WHERE ARE THE OTHERS?

C'MON, COME OVER HERE.
HAHA. HERE YOU GO, HERE YOU GO.

M HAD BROUGHT DOG BISCUITS AND WAS DIVVYING THEM UP EVENLY AMONG THE DOGS.
HERE, TANI!
HERE, ICHI!
M SLUNG HIS RIFLE OVER HIS SHOULDER AND SET OFF TOWARD THE VALLEY.
I'VE STILL GOT AN ITCH TO DO THAT.
I'M GONNA TAKE A LOOK AROUND OVER THERE.

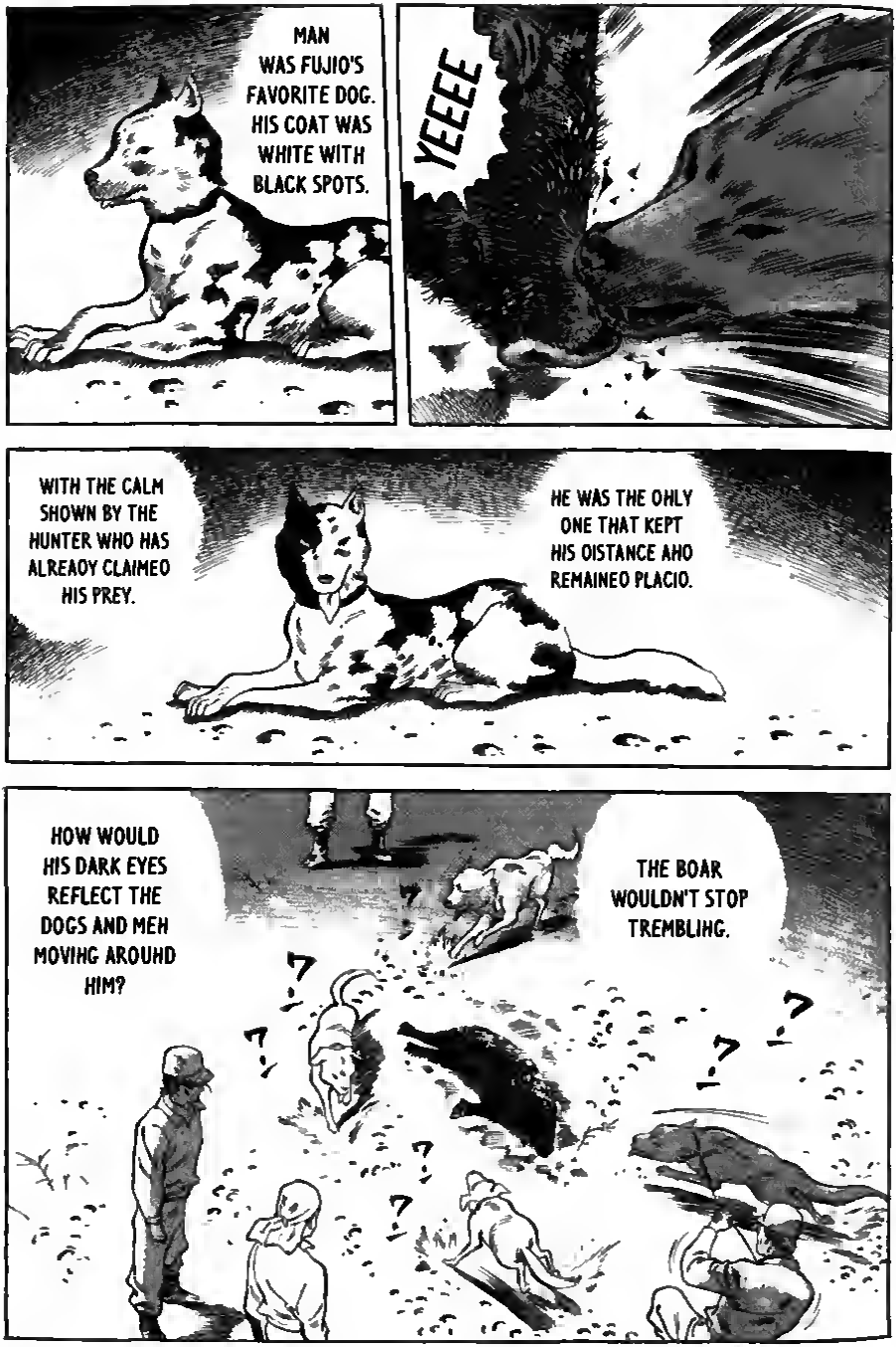
HEY THERE!
A LITTLE WHILE LATER T AND Y CAME DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAIN
BUT THEN I HEARD M SAY THAT HE'D SEEN A BOAR, SO I CAME BACK DOWN IN A HURRY.
WE DIDN'T KNOW WHERE THEY WERE, SO I CLIMBED UP A TREE.
WE HEARD THE DOGS BARKING.
HUH? REALLY? BUT EVEN THAT BOAR HASN'T TURNED UP YET. YOU THINK WITH THIS SNOW IT'S STAYING IN THE FOREST TO SLEEP OR WHAT?
THAT TRAIL ISN'T JUST FROM A BOAR.
I CAME DOWN IN SUCH A HURRY THAT I TUMBLED HEAD OVER HEELS AND HURT MY BACKSIDE.

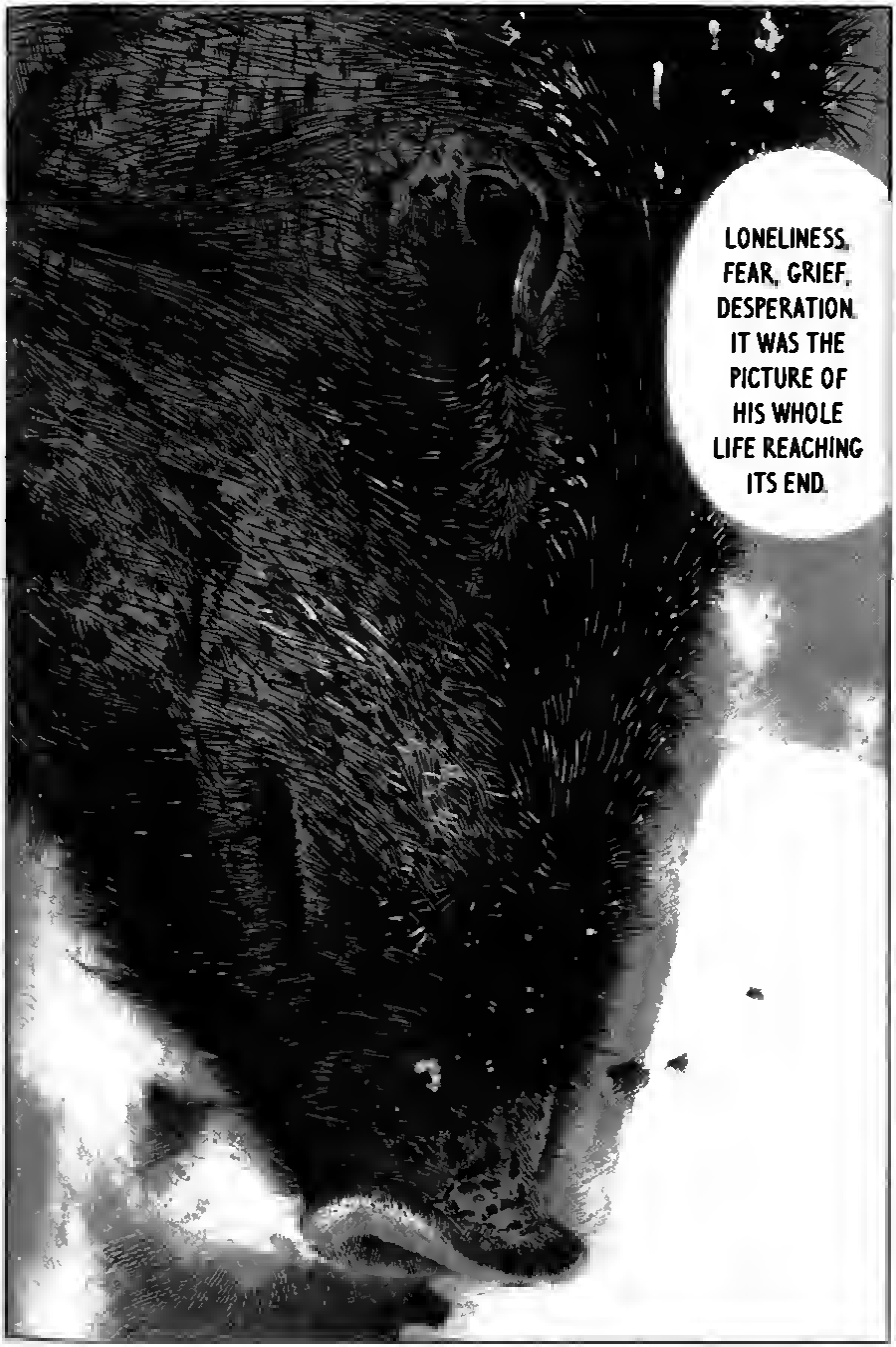
HEY!
NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, I THINK I DID TOO.
DIDN'T YOU HEAR SOMETHING?
HMMM, IT SOUNDED LIKE THE CALL OF A BOAR TO ME.
SHOULDN'T HE HAVE FINISHED EATING BY NOW?
BY THE WAY, WHERE IS MAN?

IT SOUNDS LIKE HE GOT IT!
HEEEY! LEASH THE DOGS!
M'S VOICE RANG OUT FROM THE VALLEY.
THEN M CAME INTO VIEW, WITH SOMETHING ON HIS SHOULOERS ANO NO EXPRESSION ON HIS FACE.
COME HERE, ICHI!
Y PUT THE LEASH ON ICHI. AT TIMES WHEN HE SAW A QUARRY HE'O GET SO ANXIOUS THAT YOU COULON'T CONTROL HIM WITH JUST YOUR HANOS

IT WAS A SMALL BOAR PIGLET.
MAN KILLED IT?
YEP. WHEN I GOT THERE HE HAD THROWN IT TO THE GROUND AND WAS PLAYING.

BUT IT'S SMALLER THAN I THOUGHT.
AT FIRST I JUST SAW THE HEAD AND IT LOOKED PRETTY BIG TO ME.
ICHI WAS RESTLESS AND WOULDN'T STOP BARKING.
THE BOAR WAS STILL ALIVE.
BRIEF SPASMS COURSED THROUGH ITS BODY, COVERED IN BLOOD AND SNOW.
HEY!


MAN WAS FUJIO'S FAVORITE DOG. HIS COAT WAS WHITE WITH BLACK SPOTS.
YEEEE
WITH THE CALM SHOWN BY THE HUNTER WHO HAS ALREADY CLAIMED HIS PREY.
HE WAS THE ONLY ONE THAT KEPT HIS DISTANCE AND REMAINED PLACID.
HOW WOULD HIS DARK EYES REFLECT THE DOGS AND MEN MOVING AROUND HIM?
THE BOAR WOULDN'T STOP TREMBLING.


LONELINESS. FEAR. GRIEF. DESPERATION. IT WAS THE PICTURE OF HIS WHOLE LIFE REACHING ITS END.

I'M GONNA FINISH IT OFF...
I WAS TRYING TO KEEP A SMILE ON MY LIPS, TO TRY AND HOLD BACK THE ANGUISH THAT WAS OVERWHELMING MY HEART.
GHEE EEEE
ドゴ
YOU CAN'T KILL IT LIKE THAT.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

THE BLOOD, WITH ITS LIVING RED COLOR, SPLASHED ALL OVER.
THE CLOUDS COVERED THE SUN AND IT STOPPED SNOWING.
A BITTERLY COLD WIND WAS BLOWING.

Chapter 9: Our Hunting Diary (Part 2)

SO GLOATED FUJIO, WHO ARRIVED LATER ON.
THIS IS THE SIXTH BOAR THAT DOG'S CAUGHT.
IF THINGS TURN OUT WELL, PERHAPS WE CAN BAG ANOTHER.
WE'RE HEADING TOWARD MURE VALLEY.
BUT TRY TO CATCH A BIGGER ONE NEXT TIME.

YOU'VE GOT THAT WRONG. THEY LATCHED ONTO IT CAUSE IT'S WEAK, YOU SEE.
IT'S SMALL FOR A YEARLING. MAYBE IT WAS LEFT LIKE THAT FROM BEING INFESTED WITH FLEAS.
IT'S FULL OF FLEAS.
EVERYONE WAS EXHAUSTED, AND WE WALKED IN SMALL GROUPS WITHOUT MUCH MERRIMENT.
WE CAME INTO A DRY VALLEY FILLED WITH ROCKS.

IT LOOKS LIKE THE KIND OF CLIFF WHERE A SEROW WOULD LIVE.
THIS IS A GOOD HUNTING SPOT. WE MIGHT SEE A DEER.
YEAH, THERE ARE SEROWS HERE TOO.
AS SOON AS THEY SEE THE DOGS THEY SCAMPER UP THE CLIFF.
THEY'RE INTERESTING CRITTERS.
OOOI!
OOOI!
ONCE THEY'RE THERE, THEY KNOW THE DOGS CAN'T COME CLOSE, SO THEY STAND STILL. THEN YOU CAN SHOOT 'EM AT YOUR LEISURE.

SEROWS ARE CURIOUS ANIMALS IF THEY HEAR A HOISE, THEY SOMETIMES COME OUT.
OOOI!
OOOI!
THE SNOW WAS WHIPPING THROUGH THE AIR AGAIN.
THERE ARE NO BOARS HERE.
THE SKY GREW OARK AND IT BEGAN TO GET TERRIBLY COLD.
IF THERE WERE THEY WOULD'VE KICKED UP THE VALLEY SOIL AND WE'D KNOW RIGHT AWAY.

I WAS ALSO HUNGRY, AND MY LEGS HURT.
WE KEPT WALKING WITHOUT TOO MUCH CONVERSATION, TAKING TURNS CARRYING THE BOAR.
YEAH, ME TOO.
I'D LIKE TO DO IT AT LEAST ONCE, EVEN IF I'M AIMING AT AIR.
WE STILL DIDN'T GET TO FIRE A SINGLE SHOT YET TODAY, DAMN IT!

WHAT? A PIGLET AGAIN?
UMMM.
I BOUGHT A WHOLE SHO OF SAKE.
I THOUGHT YOU'D BRING BACK A DEER OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT.
YEAH, YEAH. A PIGLET AGAIN?
UMMM.

HOW ARE WE GONNA SKIN IT IF IT'S COVERED WITH FLEAS?
HEE HEE HEE.
FUJIO'S DAUGHTER, WHO WAS ATTENDING GRADE SCHOOL, USED TO MIMIC HER MOTHER'S WAY OF SPEAKING
SOUNDS GOOD. THAT'S HOW WE'LL DO IT.
WHY DON'T WE PUT IT IN THE FIRE TO BURN OFF ITS FUR?
ROAST BOAR!
HURRAY, ROAST BOAR!

I DON'T LIKE EITHER BOYS OR DOGS.
HEY, HEY! GET OUTTA HERE!
BUT EVEN IF IT'S JUST THIS 'UN, I'M SURE YOU CAN DRINK TO IT.
IT'S JUST A BABY, AIN'T IT?
THE NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBOR AND FUJIO'S FATHER, WHO WAS RETIRED, CAME BY WHEN THEY HEARD THE COMMOTION.

ON THE WAY BACK THEY HAD BEEN TRYING TO SHOOT FOREST PIGEONS AND GOT DELAYED.
THE REST OF THE PARTY ARRIVED AFTER A BIT.
AFTER ALL, IT'S NOT THAT TINY.
I WISH IT WAS A LITTLE BIT FATTER.
IT'S SKINNY, EH?
AT LEAST IT'S BETTER THAN A RABBIT.
BUT EVEN IF IT'S A BABY, IT'S STILL OK.

THAT'S NOT MEAT, IT'S JUST BLOOD.
HURRY UP. DON'T LEAVE SO MUCH MEAT ON THE SKIN.
WE CAN MASH THEM UP AND BOIL 'EM WITH THE MEAT.
SHOULD WE TOSS THE BONES TO THE DOGS?
DON'T CUT THE BLADDER, OTHERWISE IT'LL GIVE OFF AN UNBEARABLE STENCH.
WHAT DO WE DO WITH THE TONGUE?
THERE'S STILL MEAT IN THE NECK.

WHEN THEY EAT THE MEAT OF THE PREY, OOGS OEYELOP THEIR HUNTIHG INSTINCTS EVEN FURTHER.
WE TOSSEO THE ENTRAILS, SKIN, AHO SKULLBOHES TO THE OOGS.
AS I ENTEREO THE HOUSE, I SAW THAT M ANO S WERE CUTTIHG THE MEAT UNOER THE FAIHT GLOW OF A LIGHT BULB
THE MEAT'LL LOSE ITS FLAVOR IF WE WASH IT.
WE CUT IT JUST LIKE THAT?
だん!!

OOF
YOU OUGHTA CUT IT IN THICKER CHUNKS. HEE, HEE, HEE.
HOW HEAVY THIS IS!
PUT IT ALL IN AT ONCE. IF YOU DO IT ONE BY ONE WE'LL NEVER GET IT FINISHED.
HERE'S AN-OTHER.
ばさっ
ばさっ!

ONCE THE MEAT WAS PUT IN WITH THE BONES, WE HAD SO MUCH STEW THAT IT ALMOST BOILED OVER.
COME ON, COME ON, GATHER ROUND AND LET'S EAT TOGETHER.
AHEE...
THOUGH IT MUST BE BORING FOR YOU TO SIT WITH A FEEBLE OLD WOMAN LIKE ME.
I'LL SIT BESIDE TOSHI-KATSU.

COME ON, COME ON. DRINK UP, YOU GUYS.
HERE YOU GO, DRINK UP.
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THE MEAT IS SO TENDER!
YUMMY!
THOUGH THERE WERE SCALLIONS AND HOMEMADE KONNYAKU* IN THE STEW TOO, THESE WERE IMBUED WITH THE BOAR'S FLAVOR AS WELL.
ONE YEAR AGO HE WAS THE ONLY DOG THAT WOULD'VE BEEN ABLE TO DRIVE OUT A BOAR LIKE THAT ONE.
A BOAR STOMPED ON HIM IN A FIGHT.
HOW DID HIS LEG GET HURT?
MY ICHI'S LEG HURTS HIM SO BADLY THAT NOW HE'S HARDLY ANY USE AT ALL.
I WANNA HAVE A GOOD DOG TOO.

AND OF COURSE, NOBODY'D BE ABLE TO RAISE A HUNTING DOG BY PUTTING IT IN DIAPERS, SO WE'RE NOT GETTING ANYWHERE.
SHEESH.
BUT MY MOM SAYS THAT A DOG WOULD GET FILTH ALL OVER AND DOESN'T EVEN WANNA HEAR A WORD ABOUT IT.
THROWING YOUR MONEY AWAY BY BUYING A DOG IS PLAIN FOOLISH.
WHERE COULD I BUY A HUNTING DOG LIKE A MAN OUGHTA HAVE?
I DON'T LIKE HOW YOU BOAST SO MUCH EITHER PAPA.
IF YOU TRAIN IT WELL, YOU'LL HAVE AN OUTSTANDING DOG.
AS LONG AS YOU GET YOUR HANDS ON ONE OF THOSE ABANDONED PUPS THAT'LL BE MORE THAN GOOD ENOUGH.
I DON'T LIKE HOW YOU JUMP AT THE LEAST OPPORTUNITY TO START BOASTING.
IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME, LOOK AT OUR MAN.

I'LL ONLY EAT MEAT, NO RICE AT ALL.
NO.
AREN'T YOU GOING TO HAVE SOME RICE?
I DO LIKE THE BONES.
WHEN T GOT DRUNK HE FELL ASLEEP USING HIS ARM AS A PILLOW
WITH SIX MEN DRINKING OUT OF LARGE CUPS, THE THREE BOTTLES OF ONE SHO WERE SOON EMPTIED.
SOON THE CONVERSATION TURNED TO TALES OF SUPERNATURAL OCCURRENCES IN THE MOUNTAINS.
I LIVED IN DOKYUSAWA FROM THE TIME I WAS YOUNG.
YOU KNOW IT'S TRUE WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT TANUKIS BEING ABLE TO HOODWINK PEOPLE.

WHEN WE WERE LITTLE THE REST OF US USED TO ENJOY GOING OUT IN THE AFTERNOON TO WATCH THE MOUNTAIN PASS...
SHE ALWAYS CAME BACK HOME FOR THE OBON HOLIDAYS, BRINGING SOME SOUVENIR.
BACK IN THOSE DAYS MY SISTER HAD GONE TO WORK IN THE HOME OF A CHARCOAL MERCHANT IN TANABE.
AS NORMALLY NOBODY CAME UP THE MOUNTAIN TO SEE US. WE DIDN'T HAVE THE SLIGHTEST DOUBT IT WAS HER.
AFTER A LITTLE WHILE, WE COULD SEE THE LIGHT OF THE LANTERN
MY SISTER ALWAYS USED TO COME BY HERSELF THAT WAY, CARRYING A LANTERN
BUT AFTER THAT, NO ONE SHOWED UP NO MATTER HOW LONG WE WAITED.
AND TRICKLED INTO THE VALLEY BEYOND THE RICE FIELDS.
THE LANTERN'S LIGHT SLOWLY DESCENDED ALONG THE PATH.

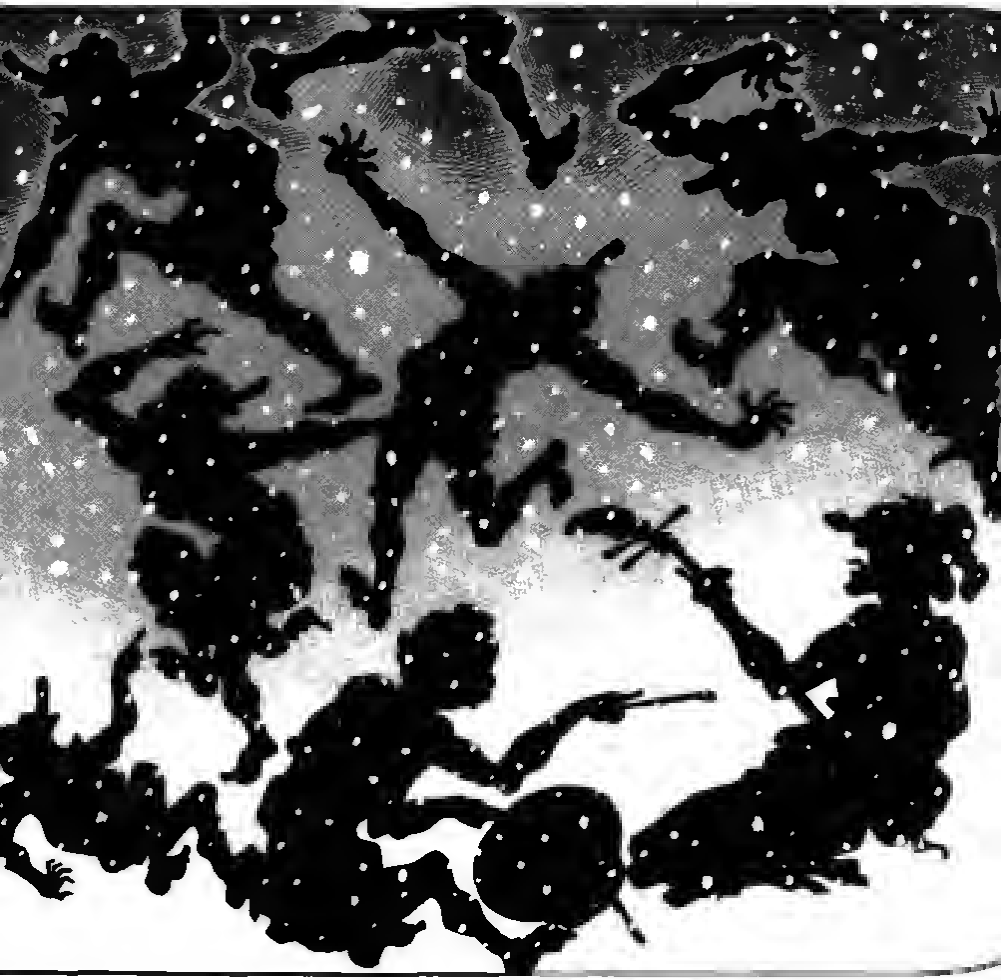
WHOO-OA...
THERE'S NO DOUBT IT MUST HAVE BEEN THE PRANK OF SOME TANUKI.
HE SAW A DEER SHIMMYING UP A TALL TREE.
BUT IN SPITE OF HOW STRANGE ALL THAT WAS, HE DIDN'T DOUBT HIS EYES FOR A SECOND.
AHEM.
MY FATHER TOLD ME THIS STORY.
ONE DAY A HUNTER WENT TO THE MOUNTAIN.

HE TOOK AIM WITH HIS RIFLE AND FIRED.
BANG
HOWEVER, WHEN THE HUNTER SET TO LOOKING, HE DIDN'T MANAGE TO FIND IT
THE DEER FELL FROM THE TREE AND HE HEARD THE SOUND OF WATER SPLASHING FROM THE CREEK BELOW
I GOT IT!
AND THEN, ALL OF A SUDDEN, HE FELT THERE WAS SOMETHING BEHIND HIM AND TURNED AROUND

NO ONE KNOWS WHO THAT WOMAN REALLY WAS.
THE WOMAN HAD JUST A SINGLE GIANT BOOB IN THE CENTER OF HER CHEST.
THERE WAS A WOMAN STANDING THERE, STARK NAKED.
BUT AFTER GOING HOME, THE HUNTER FELL ILL AND DIED SHORTLY AFTER.
YOU'VE ALREADY TOLD THAT STORY A MILLION TIMES.
THEY ALSO SAY THAT THE CROWS CAWED WHEN HE DIED.

HUH? REALLY?
YOU'VE ALREADY TOLD THAT STORY A MILLION TIMES.
ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!
THE PARTYING AND DRINKING LASTED ALL NIGHT LONG.

Chapter 10:
The Pillow of Snow

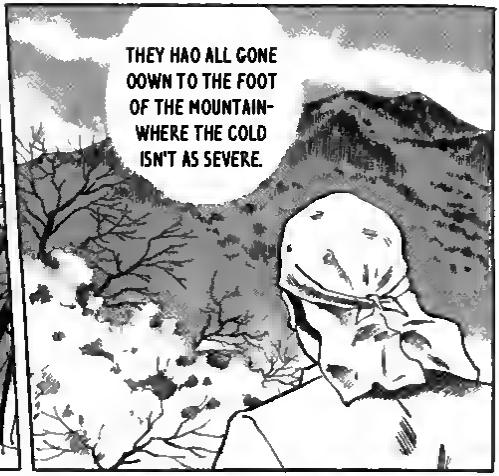


I SAW THE SNOW THIS YEAR AS WELL.
THE ICE AND SNOW CAN LAST FOR DAYS AND DAYS WITHOUT MELTING.
ON THE NORTH SLOPE OF THE MOUNTAIN THERE ARE MANY SPOTS THE RAYS OF THE SUN DON'T REACH.

ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT THE WIND USED TO BLOW THE DRY SNOW AGAINST THE CABIN.
ON A HILL AT THE SUMMIT A SMALL CABIN RECEIVES THE FULL FORCE OF THE WINTER WINDS.
THE NIGHT SNOW SLIPPED IN BETWEEN THE CRACKS OF THE CABIN...
...AND FELL ON MY FACE WHILE I WAS SLEEPING.

I COULO SLEEP SOUNOLY EVEN ON THE NIGHTS WHEN SNOW WAS FALLING ON MY FACE.
NOW, I LIKE THE COLD, AND I ESPECIALLY LOVE SNOW.
..ANO PILEO UP BESIOE MY PILLOW.
WHEN I WOULO WAKE UP IN THE MORNING, I COULO SEE THAT THE SNOW HAO COME IN THROUGH THE CRACKS IN THE CABIN...
NOR WOULO YOU SEE ANY ANIMALS.
AFTER THE FIRST SNOW, YOU'O SELOOM HEAR THE BIROS SING.

THE SNOW SHONE FAINTLY BENEATH THEM. THE FOREST WAS IMMERSED IN ABSOLUTE SILENCE.
THE TREES WERE COMPLETELY BARE.


THEY HAD ALL GONE DOWN TO THE FOOT OF THE MOUNTAIN- WHERE THE COLD ISN'T AS SEVERE.

WHEN THE MOUNTAIN WAS LIKE THIS I USED TO LISTEN IN SILENCE, NIGHT AFTER NIGHT.

WHEN NIGHT FELL, THE OTHERWORLDLY BEINGS OF THE FOREST WOULD COME OUT.

THEN I WOULD HEAR A SOUND

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YOU COULD HEAR THE SOUND OF THE CANE SLOWLY DRAWING CLOSER AND CLOSER.
AND IT WOULD COME RIGHT UP TO THE DOOR OF THE CABIN.
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IT WAS THE SOUND OF SOMEONE WALKING WITH A CANE IN THE VICINITY OF THE CABIN.
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THERE IT CAME TO A SUDDEN STOP.
AND A SHORT TIME LATER IT WOULD HEAD OFF INTO THE DISTANCE AGAIN.
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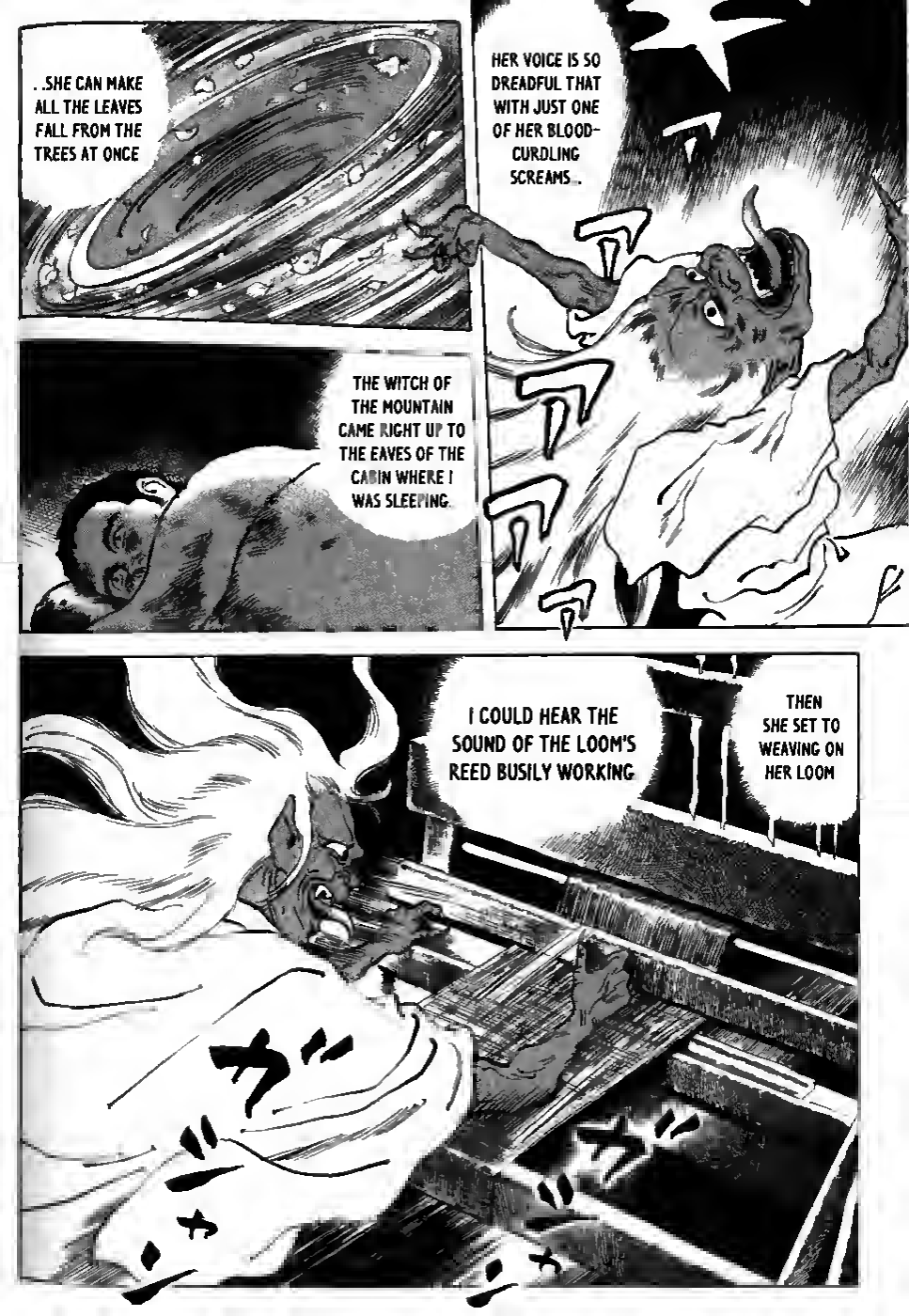
I DON'T HAVE A CLEAR IDEA WHO THE OWNER OF THAT CANE WAS.
WHO COULD IT BE?

ON THE NIGHTS WHEN THE SNOW AND THE WIND BATTERED THE CABIN, THE WITCH OF THE MOUNTAIN WOULD COME.

SHE COVERS HER BODY WITH WHITE CLOTHES.

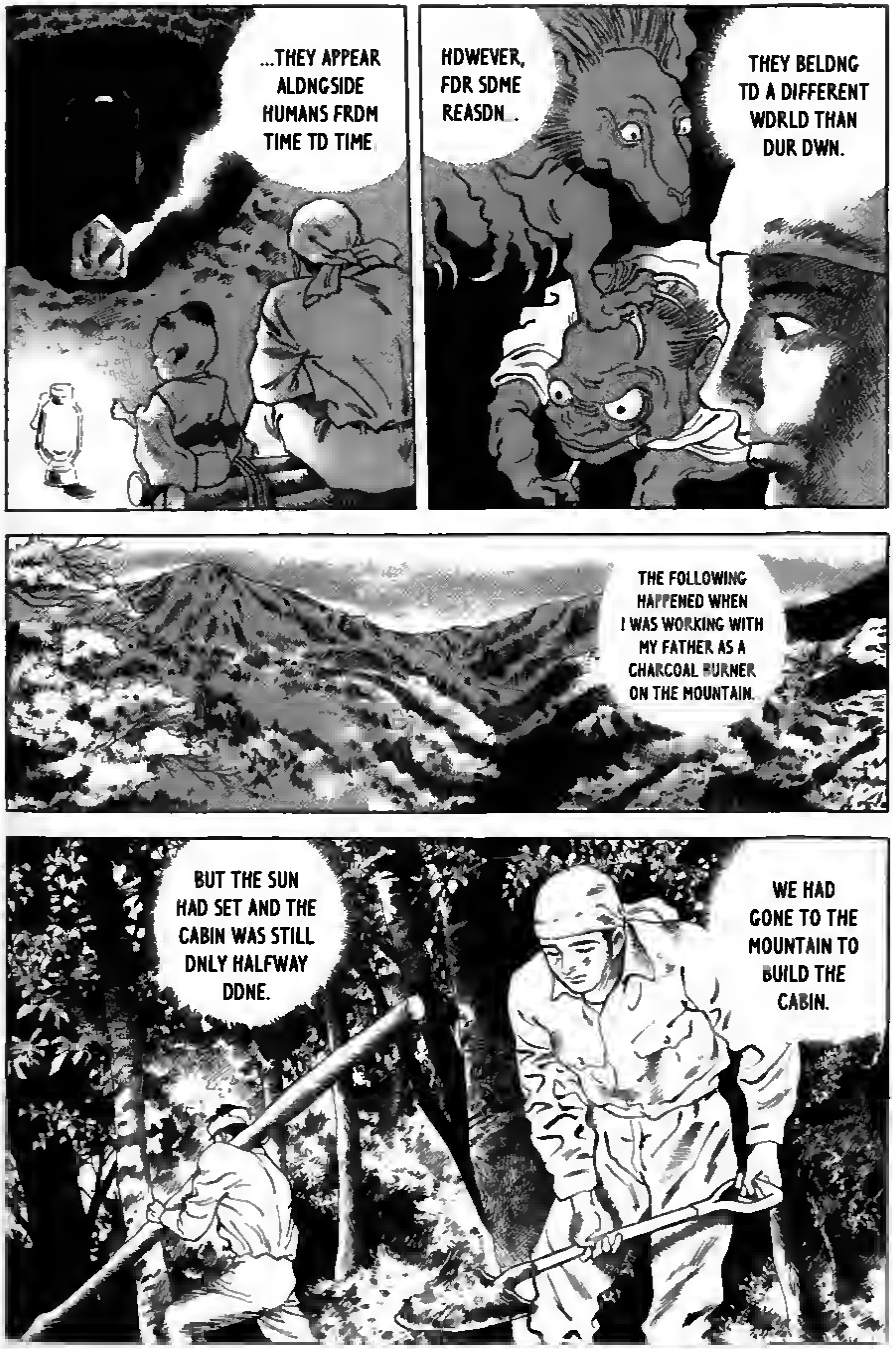
THEY SAY THAT THE WITCH OF THE MOUNTAIN IS THOUSANDS UPON THOUSANDS OF YEARS OLD. HER HAIR IS AS WHITE AS SNOW.


..SHE CAN MAKE ALL THE LEAVES FALL FROM THE TREES AT ONCE
HER VOICE IS SO DREADFUL THAT WITH JUST ONE OF HER BLOOD-CURDLING SCREAMS...
THE WITCH OF THE MOUNTAIN CAME RIGHT UP TO THE EAVES OF THE CABIN WHERE I WAS SLEEPING.
I COULD HEAR THE SOUND OF THE LOOM'S REED BUSILY WORKING.
THEN SHE SET TO WEAVING ON HER LOOM

ON THE SNOWIER NIGHTS...
BUT OCCASIONALLY I SAW SOMETHING FLUTTERING THAT LOOKED LIKE A WHITE DRESS.
I NEVER TRIED TO CHECK AND SEE IF SHE WAS REALLY THERE.
THE REED'S SOUND WAS STRONGER YET, AS IF THE WITCH OF THE MOUNTAIN WAS IN EVEN MORE OF A RUSH.

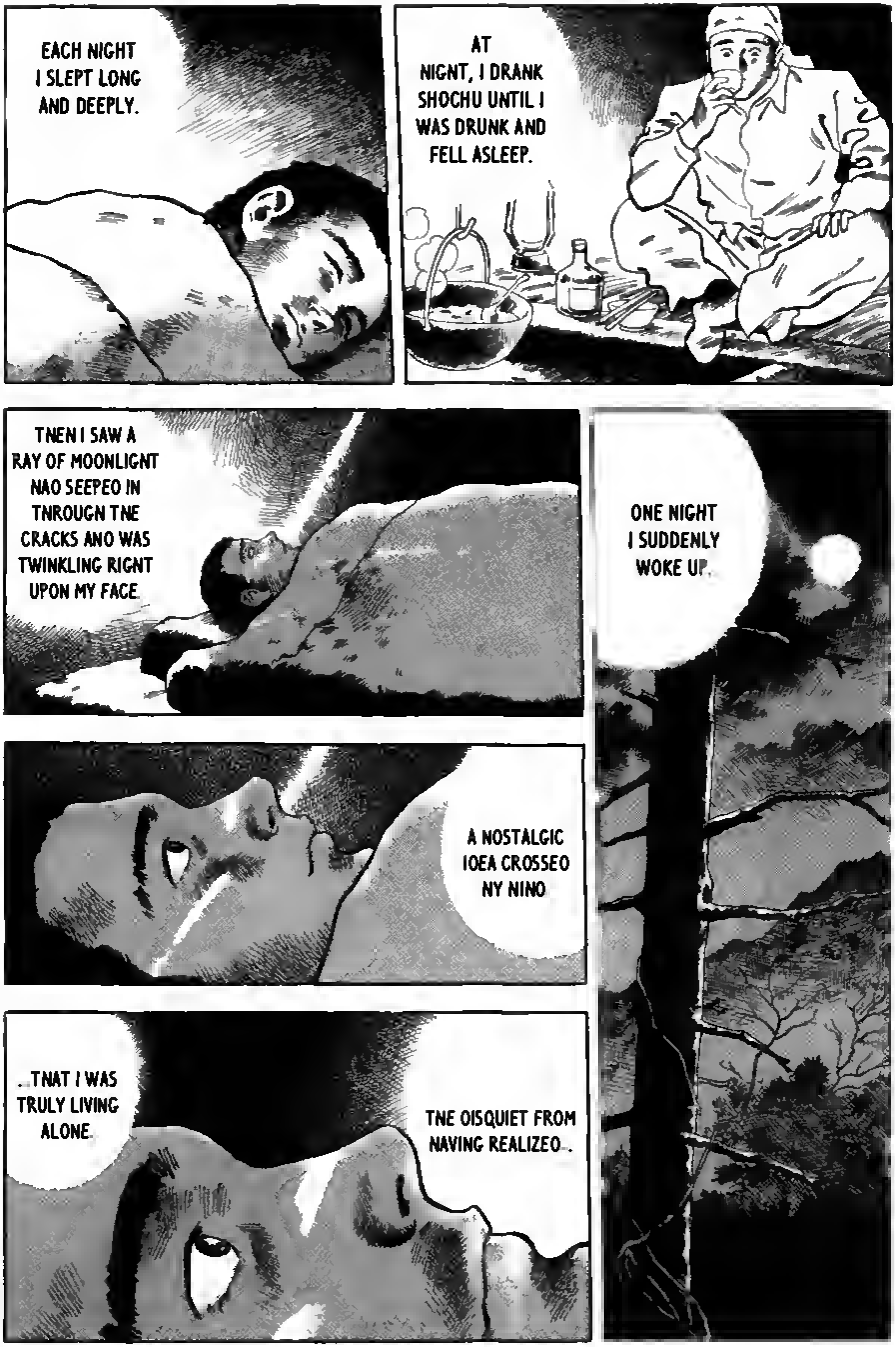
ON NIGHTS WHEN THE MOON IS SHINING...
THERE THEY'D START PLAYING LIKE CHILDREN, DOING SOMERSAULTS OR WALKING UPSIDE DOWN.
...EVERY SO OFTEN, SMALL SPIRITS WOULD GO TO THE LEAFLESS FOREST THAT LAY BEYOND THE CABIN.
THEY PROBABLY COULDN'T EXPERIENCE IT.
...SURELY WON'T FEEL THE SAME WAY.
BUT PEOPLE WHO DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS TO SPEND THE NIGHT ON THE MOUNTAIN...
TO ME, THESE BEINGS ARE RATHER CHARMING AND NOSTALGIC.

THESE SPIRITS ONLY INTERACTED WITH ME
THEY DON'T LIVE IN THIS WORLD.
THEY HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH EITHER THE LIVING OR THE DEAD.
THEY'RE SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT.
NOR ARE THEY SPIRITS OF THE DEAD...
...NOR EVEN LIKE STONES.


...THEY APPEAR ALONGSIDE HUMANS FROM TIME TO TIME.
HOWEVER, FOR SOME REASON...
THEY BELONG TO A DIFFERENT WORLD THAN OUR OWN.
THE FOLLOWING HAPPENED WHEN I WAS WORKING WITH MY FATHER AS A CHARCOAL BURNER ON THE MOUNTAIN.
BUT THE SUN HAD SET AND THE CABIN WAS STILL ONLY HALFWAY DONE.
WE HAD GONE TO THE MOUNTAIN TO BUILD THE CABIN.

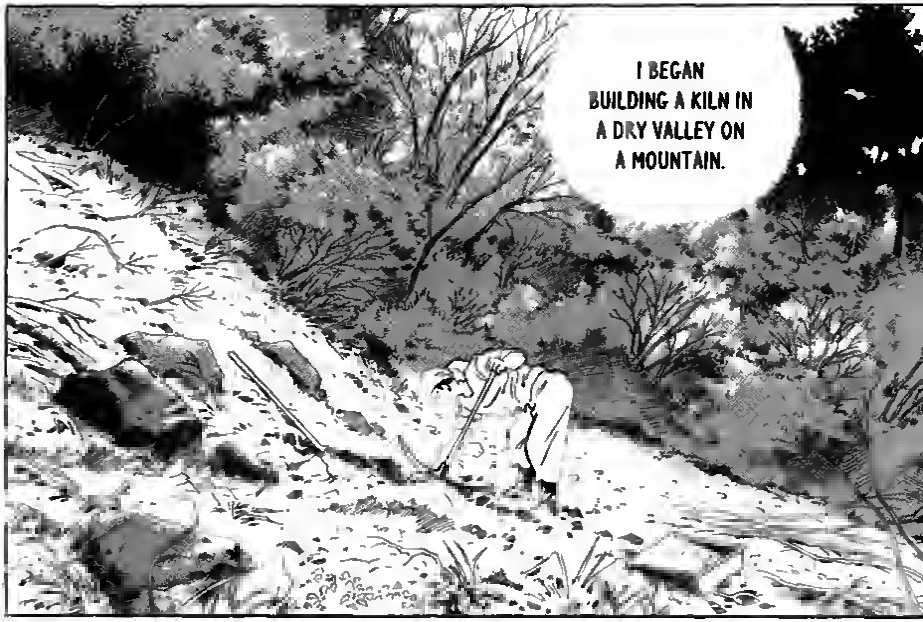
THE MOON WAS SOFTLY SHINING THAT NIGHT, AND FROST FORMED ON THE LEAVES OF THE TREES.
I HUNKERED DOWN UNDER THE BRANCHES OF A TREE TO PROTECT MYSELF FROM THE NIGHT DEW.
AS IT GREW LATER AND LATER, I FELT AS IF A WARM, PLEASANT BODY WAS EMBRACING ME.
I WAS ABLE TO SLEEP IN PEACE.

...OR IF IT WAS MERELY ACTING ON A WHIM.
I DON'T KNOW IF IT DID THIS AS A SIGN OF ITS FRIENDSHIP...
THE BODY THAT EMBRACED ME HAD A SOFT, WARM COAT.
THERE'S NO DOUBT THAT IT WAS A SPIRIT.
MY ONLY THOUGHT ON THE MATTER IS THAT IT'S IMPOSSIBLE FOR HUMANS TO UNDERSTAND WHAT MOTIVES GUIDE THEIR ACTIONS.
I PUT MY NOSE TO THE GRINDSTONE EVERY DAY IN MY TASKS
IT DIDN'T SNOW SO MUCH THAT I COULDN'T WORK.


EACH NIGHT I SLEPT LONG AND DEEPLY.
AT NIGHT, I DRANK SHOCHU UNTIL I WAS DRUNK AND FELL ASLEEP.
THEN I SAW A RAY OF MOONLIGHT HAD SEEPED IN THROUGH THE CRACKS AND WAS TWINKLING RIGHT UPON MY FACE.
ONE NIGHT I SUDDENLY WOKE UP.
A NOSTALGIC IDEA CROSSED MY MIND
..THAT I WAS TRULY LIVING ALONE.
THE DISQUIET FROM HAVING REALIZED..

THAT RAY OF LIGHT MUST ALSO CROSS MY FACE...
...ON THE NIGHTS WHEN I DRINK.
PERHAPS ON THE NIGHT WHEN MY BODY LIES DEAD...
...THEN TOO SHALL THE MOON BATHE ME WITH THAT PALE LIGHT

Chapter II: The Woodpecker and How You Build a Kiln


I BEGAN BUILDING A KILN IN A DRY VALLEY ON A MOUNTAIN.

I'M REFERRING TO A VALLEY WHERE THERE IS NO FLOWING WATER.
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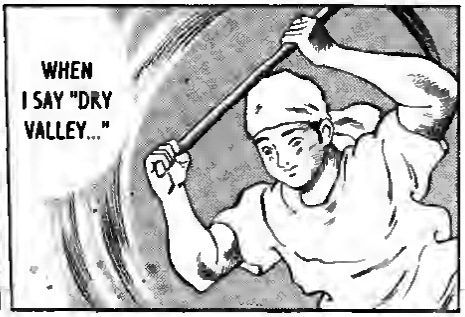
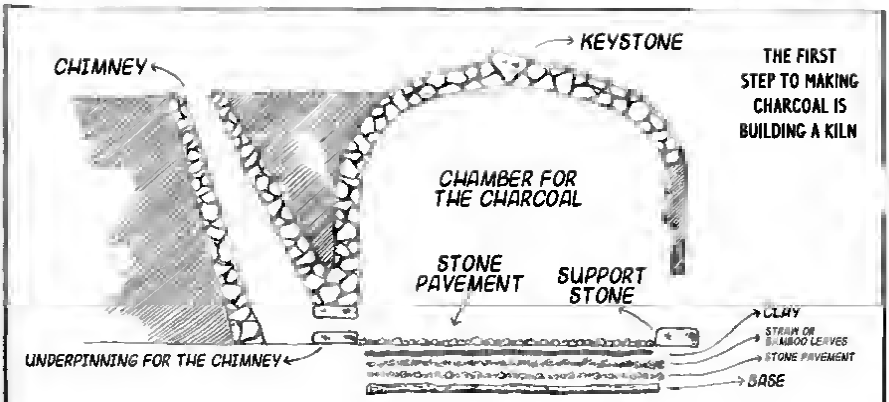

WHEN I SAY "DRY VALLEY..."


CHIMNEY
KEYSTONE
THE FIRST STEP TO MAKING CHARCOAL IS BUILDING A KILN
CHAMBER FOR THE CHARCOAL
STONE PAVEMENT
SUPPORT STONE
UNDERPINNING FOR THE CHIMNEY
CLAY
STRAW OR BAMBOO LEAVES
STONE PAVEMENT
BASE

BUILDING A NEW KILN IS A MUCH MORE COMPLICATED UNDERTAKING
IN THAT CASE YOU SAVE YOURSELF A LOT OF WORK.
WHEN YOU'RE DEALING WITH AN OLD KILN, THE ONLY THING YOU HAVE TO DO IS REPAIR IT.
WE DIDN'T HAVE EXCAVATORS OR JACKHAMMERS ON HAND
ALL THIS REQUIRED AN ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF TIME AND EFFORT.
JUST SIMPLE TOOLS SUCH AS A PICK, A MATTOCK, AND A TRAY FOR MOVING DIRT.

THE SLOPE WAS VERY PRONOUNCED, SO THE WORK WAS DIFFICULT.
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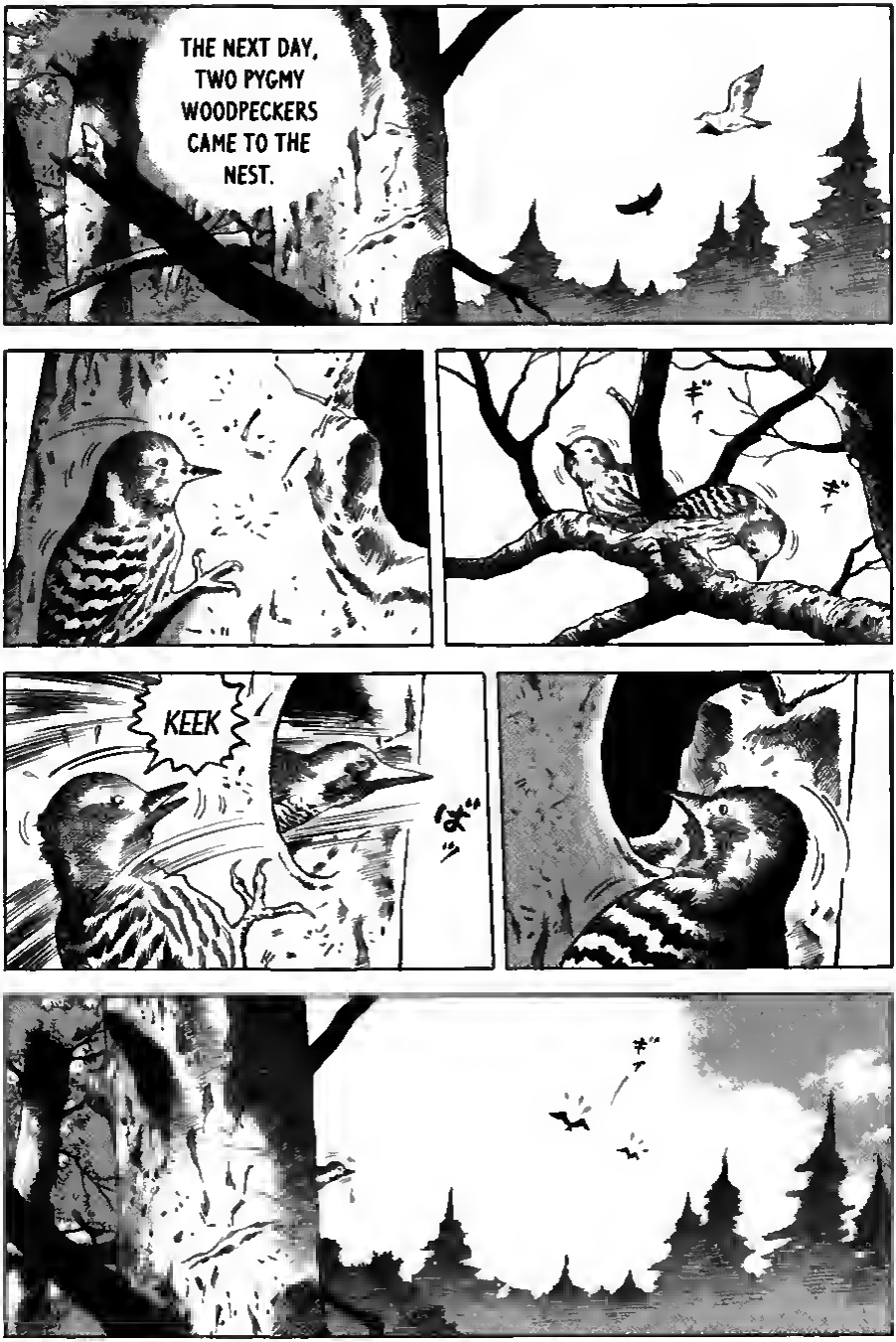
THE KILN HAD TO BE EXCAVATED FROM SQUARE ONE.
WORKING ALONE IN THE MOUNTAIN, FAR FROM THE PEOPLE OF THE VILLAGE...
BUT I SOON REALIZED THAT I WASN'T THE ONLY ONE TOILING AWAY...
A WOODPECKER HAD SHOWN UP THREE DAYS EARLIER.
...THERE, ABOUT FORTY METERS FROM MY KILN, ON THE TRUNK OF A FIR THAT WAS DEAD BUT STILL STANDING...

BIG ENOUGH FOR HIM TO GO IN AND OUT OF IT
TODAY I NOTICED THAT HE HAD DRILLED A HOLE TEN CENTIMETERS IN DIAMETER.
THE HOLE'S ABOUT FOUR METERS UP FROM THE BASE OF THE DEAD TREE
HOWEVER WHEN THE WOODPECKER ALIGHTS ON THE TREE HE ALWAYS DOES SO VERY FAR BELOW THAT HOLE
WOODPECKERS ALWAYS COME IN PAIRS
THE PLUMAGE UNDER THE EYES OF THE MALE IS RED, WHILE IN THE FEMALE IT'S WHITE
THEY SEEM TO BE PREPARING THEIR NEST TO LAY THEIR EGGS INSIDE OF THAT HOLE

THEN HE GOES ABOUT DRAGGING HIMSELF TOWARD THE OPENING.
UMMM.
HE SEEMS TO BE CONSTANTLY ON THE ALERT.
UNTIL HE GETS THERE, HE CONSTANTLY MONITORS HIS SURROUNDINGS.
UMMM.
UMMM.


THE NEXT DAY, TWO PYGMY WOODPECKERS CAME TO THE NEST.
KEEK
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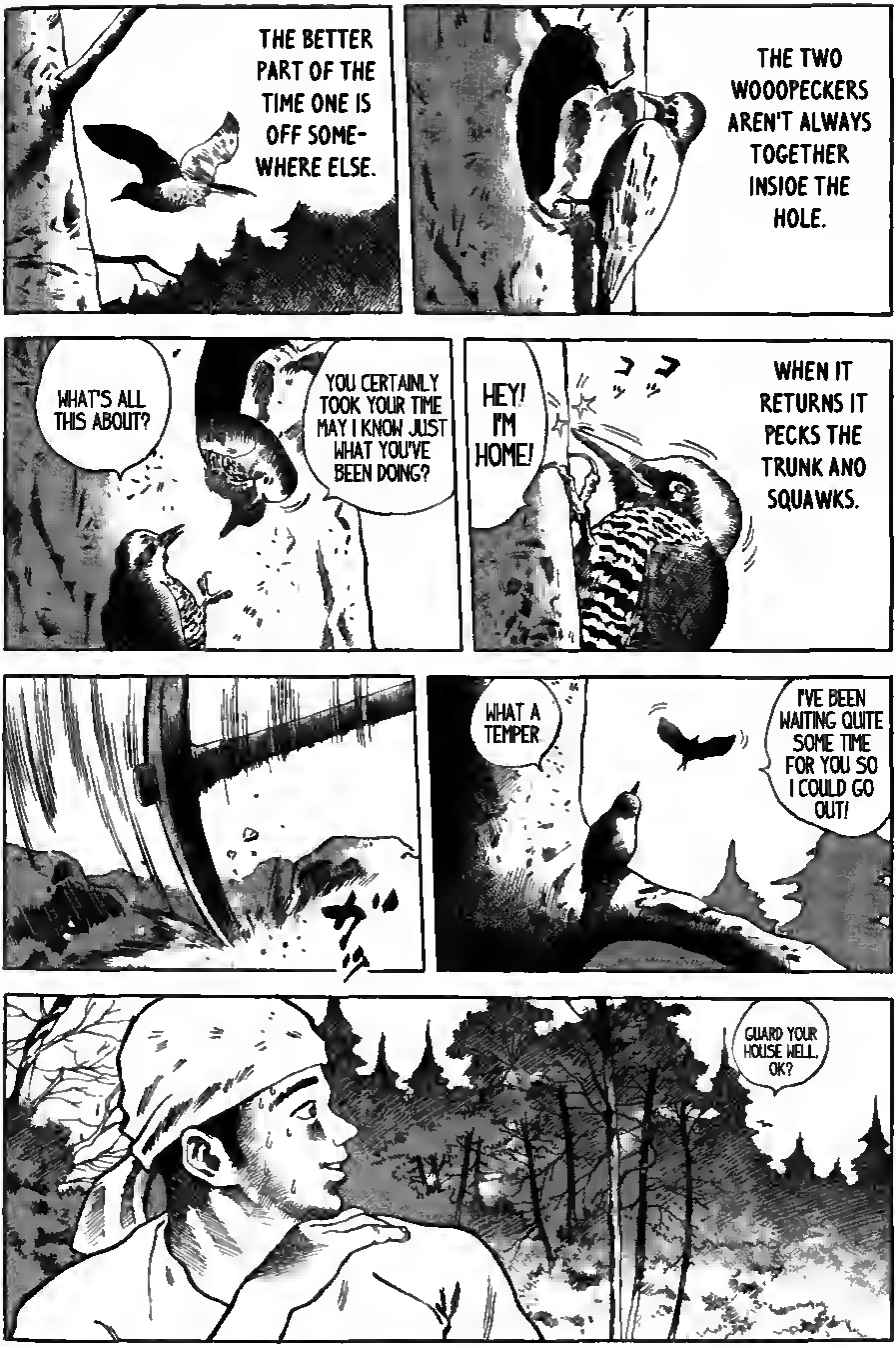
THE BETTER PART OF THE TIME ONE IS OFF SOME-WHERE ELSE.
THE TWO WOOOPECKERS AREN'T ALWAYS TOGETHER INSIOE THE HOLE.
WHAT'S ALL THIS ABOUT?
YOU CERTAINLY TOOK YOUR TIME MAY I KNOW JUST WHAT YOU'VE BEEN DOING?
HEY! I'M HOME!
WHEN IT RETURNS IT PECKS THE TRUNK ANO SQUAWKS.
WHAT A TEMPER
I'VE BEEN WAITING QUITE SOME TIME FOR YOU SO I COULD GO OUT!
GUARD YOUR HOUSE WELL, OK?

TODAY I REALIZED THAT THE HOLE IS STILL ONLY HALF DONE AND THEY STILL HAVEN'T MADE THEIR NEST.
IN THE END, IT TURNED OUT THEY WERE CONTINUING ON THE HOLE FROM INSIDE THE TREE
FOR DAYS THERE IS NO SIGN OF THE BIRDS.
THDUGH I THDUGHT I HEARD THE SDUND DF THEM PECKING A TREE IN THE DISTANCE...
I ALSO SAW THEY WERE GATHERING THE SAWDUST WITH THEIR BEAKS AND DUMPING IT OUT-SIDE OF THE TREE.
HA, HA, HA, THEY'RE DOING THE SAME THING TOO.
JUST LIKE I DO WITH MY TRAY, TOSSING THE SAND AND DIRT I EXCAVATE INTO THE DRY VALLEY

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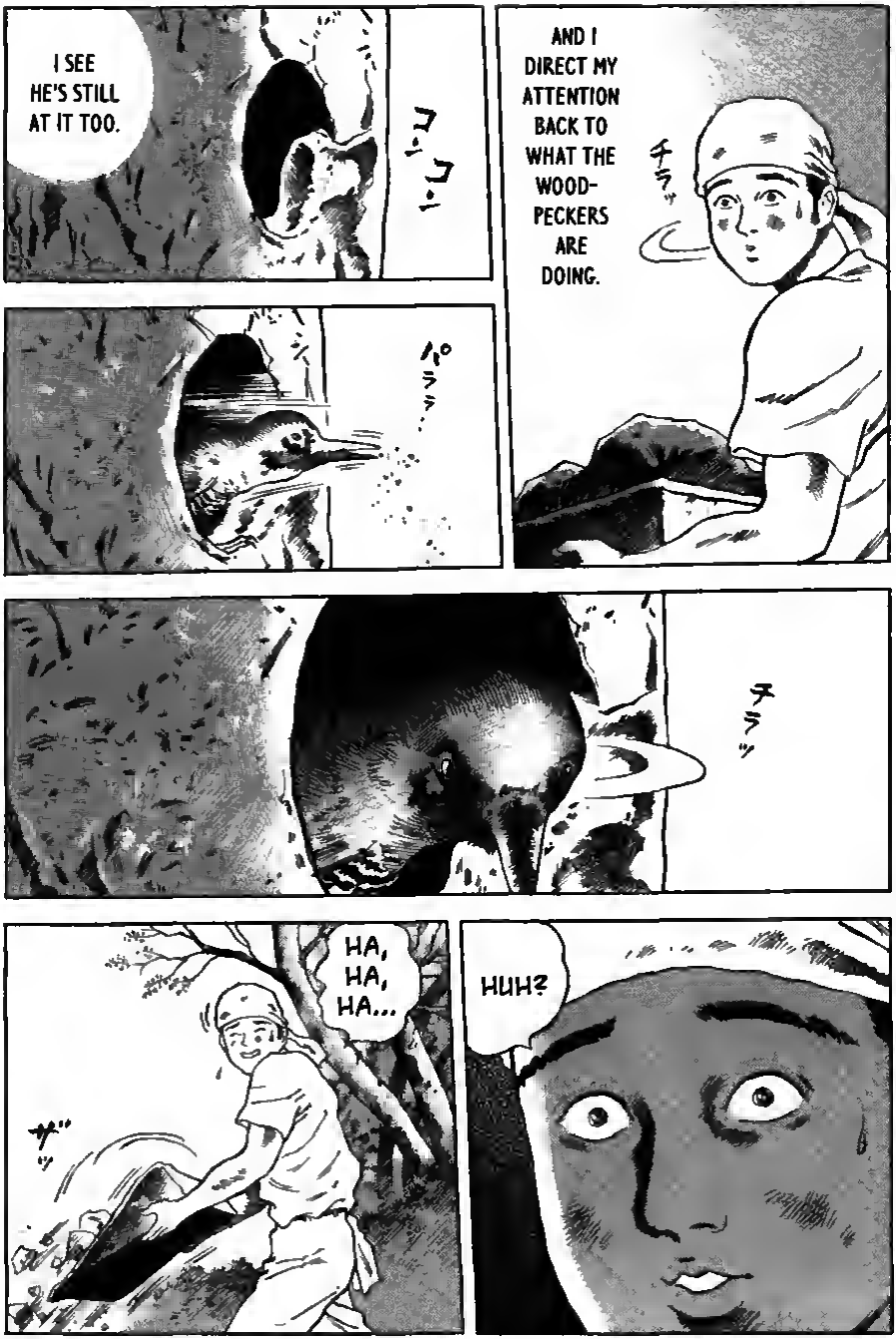
I GO BACK AND FORTH WITH MY TRAY.


I SEE HE'S STILL AT IT TOO.
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AND I DIRECT MY ATTENTION BACK TO WHAT THE WOOD-PECKERS ARE DOING.
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パラ…
チラッ
HA, HA, HA...
HUH?

KWEEEK
THE VERY FOOD ON HIS PLATE IS AT STAKE IN THE QUALITY OF THE LUMBER HE USES.
THE CHARCOAL BURNER IS ALSO A MIGRANT ABOUT THE MOUNTAINS.
SO THE PEOPLE WHO WORK AT THIS EXCLUSIVELY HAVE TO GO FROM MOUNTAIN TO MOUNTAIN, SEARCHING FOR THE BEST UBAME OAKS
SO YOU MUST LIVE IN THE MOUNTAIN WITH YOUR ENTIRE FAMILY.
IN CONTRAST TO FORESTRY JOBS, HERE A WOMAN'S WORK IS INDISPENSABLE.

THEN YOU HAVE TO LEAVE EVERYTHING BEHIND AND GO TO ANOTHER MOUNTAIN
AFTER TWO OR THREE YEARS YOU EXHAUST THE WOOD SUPPLY
CHOPPING WOOD TO MAKE CHARCOAL, LIVING IN A CABIN...
THUS THEY WERE LOOKED UPON AS THE LOWEST CLASS OF SOCIETY.
CHARCOAL BURNERS GENERALLY WEREN'T THE FIRST-BORN SONS OF VILLAGERS; THEY DIDN'T POSSESS ANY LAND TO SPEAK OF.
AFTER ALL, AS A CHARCOAL BURNER YOU CAN CHOOSE WHERE YOU'RE GOING TO WORK.
BUT ON SECOND THOUGHT IT'S BETTER THAN BEING A TENANT FARMER, WHO HAVE TO PAY A LARGE QUANTITY OF RICE AS DUES

ANO IF YOU FINO A GOOO FOREST ANO PUT IN THE EFFORT, YOU CAN EARN PLENTY OF MONEY.
NOBOOY SUPER-VISES YOUR WORK, ANO YOU OO EVERY-THING ACCOROING TO YOUR OWN JUDGMENT
EVEN IF YOU ONLY COUNT THE NUMBER OF MEN OF WORKING AGE, THE TALLY MUST HAVE BEEH APPROXIMATELY A THOUSANO.
FROM THE SECOND PART OF THE MEIJI ERA UP TO THE YEARS IN THE SHOWA ERA JUST PRIOR TO THE SECOND WORLD WAR, MANY PEOPLE EMIGRATED FROM KISHU TO KYUSHU.

DURING THE WAR AND THE POSTBELLUM PERIOD, SOCIETY'S GROWTH MADE THE MASSIVE PRODUCTION OF PLANT BASED CHARCOAL NECESSARY.
HOWEVER, THE GREAT WAR BROUGHT THE EMIGRATION OF CHARCOAL BURNERS TO A HALT.
EVEN THOUGH IT'S OF HIGH QUALITY, BINCHO-ZUMI COULD ONLY BE PRODUCED IN SMALL QUANTITIES AND FELL OUT OF FAVOR.
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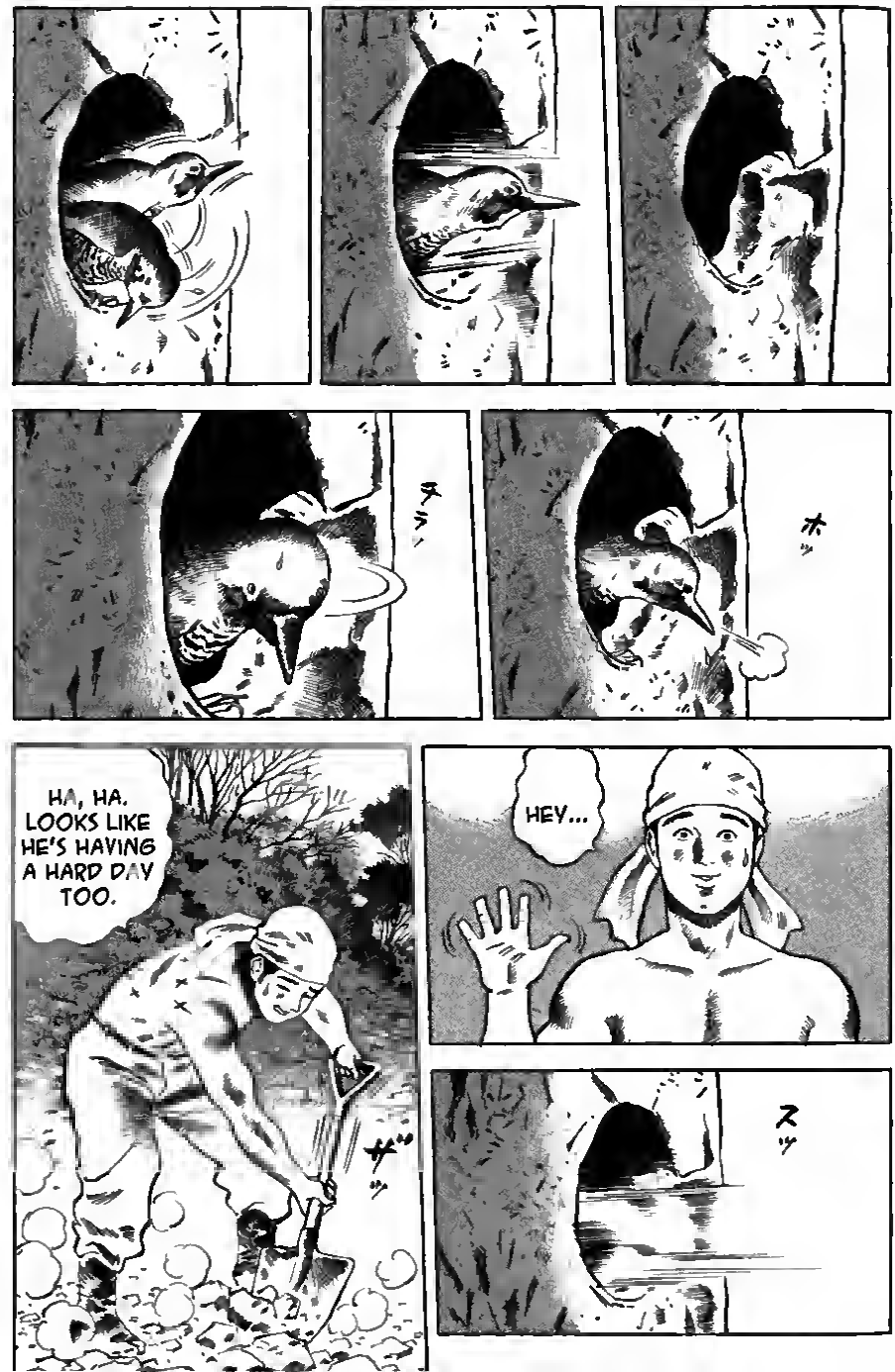
HUH?
PHEASANTS.
KWAAAY.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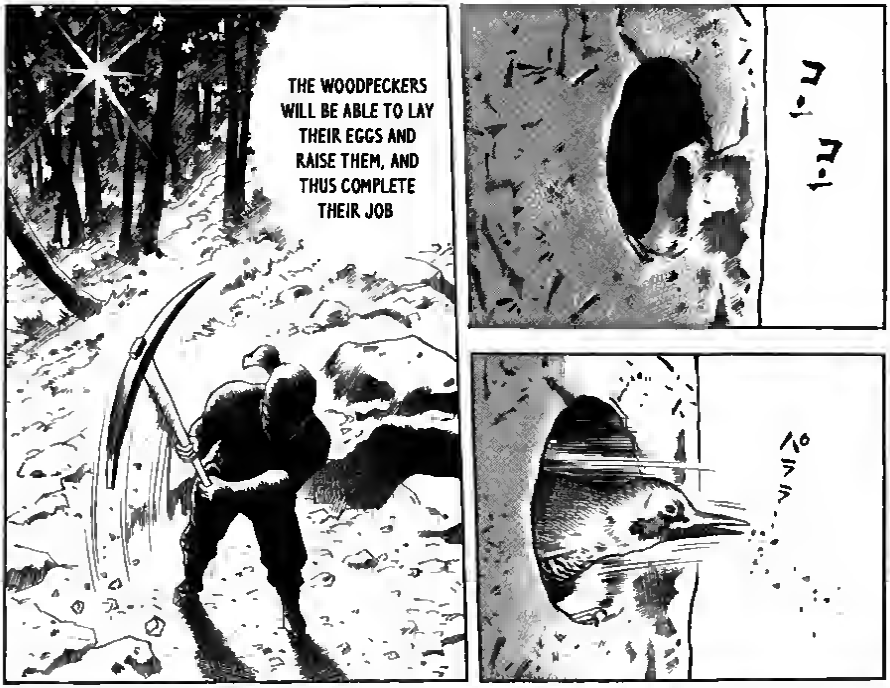
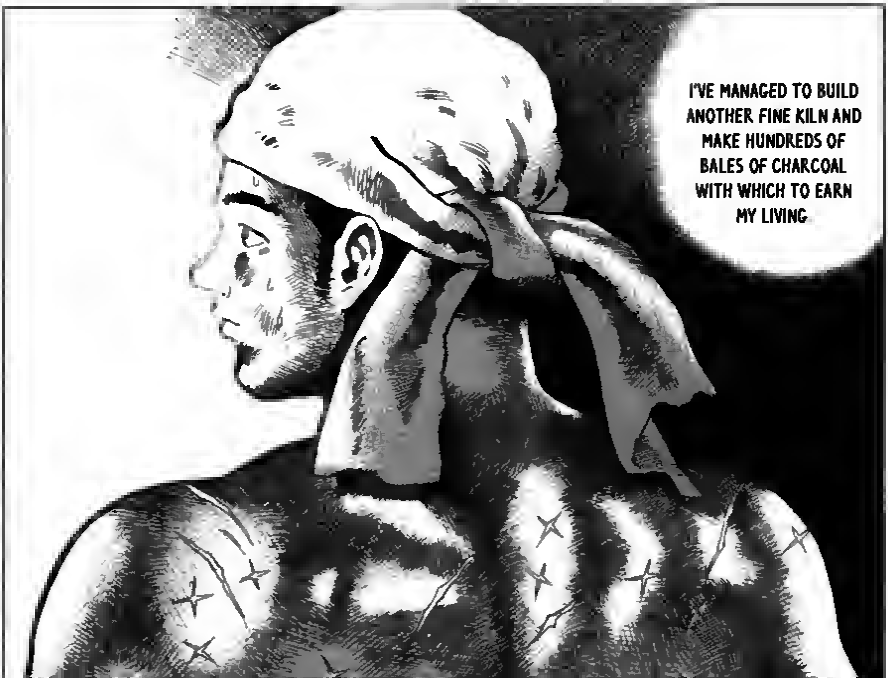
HA, HA. LOOKS LIKE HE'S HAVING A HARD DAY TOO.
ザッ
HEY...
スッ

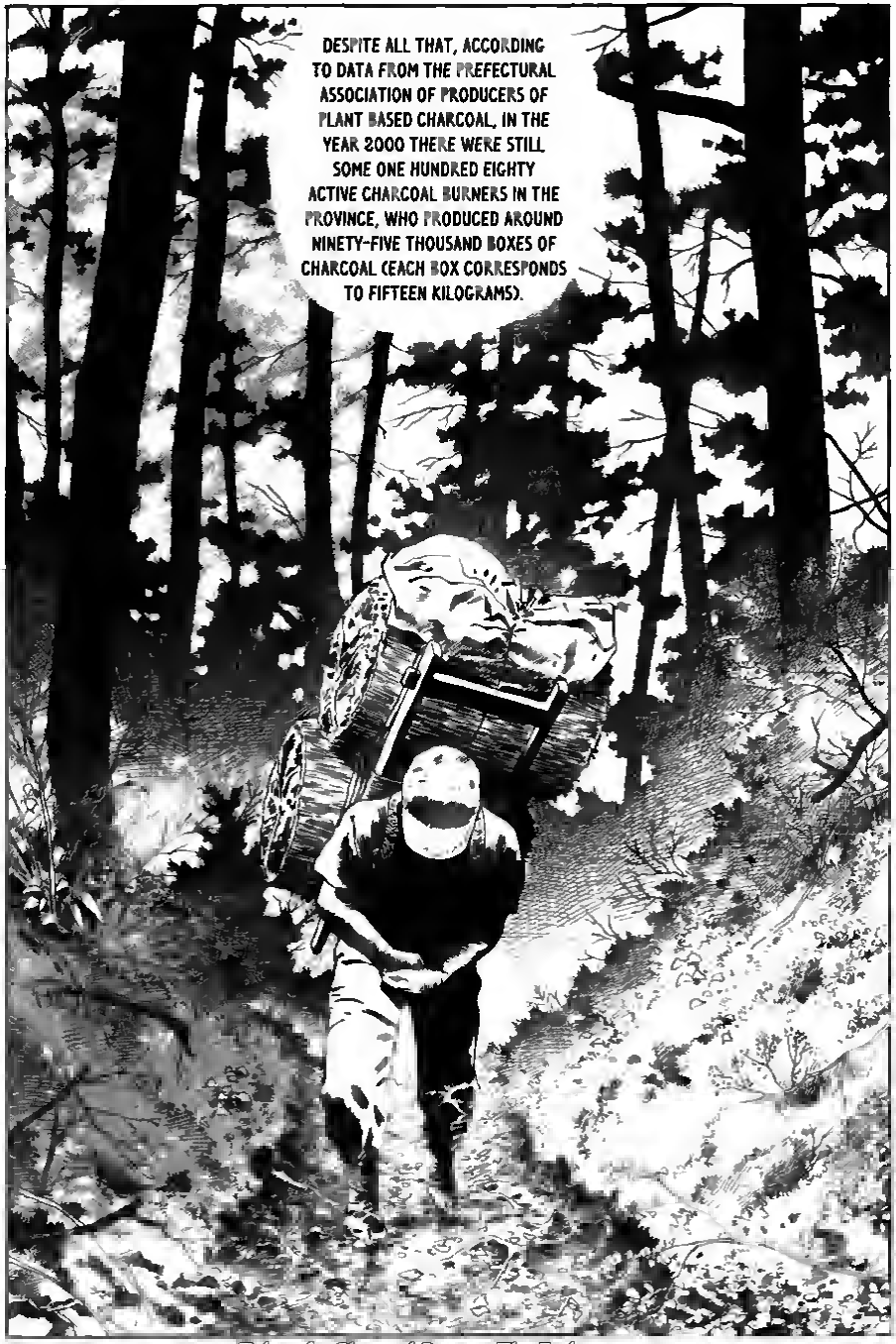
IT WAS THE SON OF MR. AND MRS. Y, WHO I'D BUMPED INTO A WHILE BACK AS I WENT DOWN THE MOUNTAIN AFTER PREPARING THE FIRE
HUH?
HEEEY!
YEAH, LONG TIME NO SEE.
AH, WHY YOU'RE...
VERY WELL, THANKS. WE'VE STARTED MAKING CHARCOAL AGAIN.
HOW'S YOUR FATHER? DOING WELL?
HEE, HEE.
YOU'VE CERTAINLY GROWN.

SO WHO WAS IT THAT BUILT THE KILN?
I DID, AS A MATTER OF FACT.
I DIDN'T KNOW.
YOUR FATHER IS WORKING AT CHARCOAL AGAIN?
OH?
LIGHTING THE FIRE IS THE FIRST STEP, BUT AT THE SAME TIME THE MOST DIFFICULT.
YOU MUST HAVE TAKEN TOO LONG TO CLOSE THE KILN.
I LOST TOO MUCH TIME HARDENING THE KILN'S MOUTH, AND THE CHARCOAL FELL TO PIECES.
BUT IT WENT BADLY.
AFTER ALL, MY FRIEND IS ALSO BUILDING IT ON HIS OWN.
HUH?
IT MUST BE TOUGH BUILDING THE KILN BY YOURSELF. I'LL LEND YOU A HAND.
NO, IT'S OK...


THE WOODPECKERS WILL BE able TO LAY THEIR EGGS AND RAISE THEM, AND THUS COMPLETE THEIR JOB
הו הו
קיווי


I'VE MANAGED TO BUILD ANOTHER FINE KILN AND MAKE HUNDREDS OF BALES OF CHARCOAL WITH WHICH TO EARN MY LIVING

ALTHOUGH THE BINCHŌ-ZUMI OF KISHU IN KANAGAWA PREFECTURE WAS NOTICEABLY AFFECTED BY THE WAR, AFTERWARD IT RECOVERED AND HELD STRONG UNTIL APPROXIMATELY 1956.
DEMAND PLUMMETED.
BUT AFTER THAT POINT IT FOUND ITSELF PUSHED ASIDE IN FAVOR OF OIL, ELECTRICITY AND GAS


DESPITE ALL THAT, ACCORDING TO DATA FROM THE PREFECTURAL ASSOCIATION OF PRODUCERS OF PLANT BASED CHARCOAL, IN THE YEAR 2000 THERE WERE STILL SOME ONE HUNDRED EIGHTY ACTIVE CHARCOAL BURNERS IN THE PROVINCE, WHO PRODUCED AROUND NINETY-FIVE THOUSAND BOXES OF CHARCOAL (EACH BOX CORRESPONDS TO FIFTEEN KILOGRAMS).

Tales of a Charcoal Burner, The End.

Graduation Thesis of Adolescence (Shigeyasu Takeno)

My first encounter with the curious and fascinating magazine, Garo, was when I was in my third year of middle school, around 1964. I recall that there was always a scene from The Legend of Kamui on its cover. From that momant my dream was to come to publish my own manga in that magazine. However, that was a dream I wasn't able to fulfill even after I became a professional artist.

This was the third time I sent a manuscript to Seirindo. The first I sent to Garo magazine was when I was twenty, in 1970 or so. It was a manga called "Yami no Barado" (The Ballad of Darkness), about an anxious student who would ask questions and answer them himself, creating a fantasy world where he looked for a way to live. At that time I was caught up in the influence of de Chirico and Magritte, and I was very interested in surrealism, so it was a very abstract and surreal work. Needless to say it wasn't accepted.

At that time my only goal was the contradictory one of getting publisbed in Garo and, at tbe same time, writing something with total freedom that would satisfy me and move away from preestablished ideas. All things considered, in 1969, smack dab in the middle of the uproar over the Treaty of Cooperation with tbe United States, I was practically obligated to do that experiment. In the Garo of that era, where Katsuichi Nagai was still working, their new authors were continuously experimenting. (Note - Katsuichi Nagai was the founder of Garo in 1964.)

So, witbout realizing it, little by little Garo seemed to be weigbed down by principles and arguments and, despite having set off great change in the world of manga and having brought such important artists as Yosbibaru Tsuge and Sunoki Sbohei to light, soon found itself disregarded by the commercial world and cast off as if it were a heretic.

Now back to my story, the second time I sent a manuscript to Garo was six years after I fell ill and had retired from the world of manga. I was 38 years old, and at that time I was also in and out of employment. Perhaps that preoccupation became one of the elements in that work, Mikaijin no Obuje (The Object of the Savage). A manga of crude illustrations drawn solely by pen, without names, witbout plot. It had sixteen pages in all and took me a month to complete it. What's more, it was a deeply surrealistic work, really hard to defend. Perhaps it would be more appropriate not to consider it as manga. In the end, it was also rejected.

"Tales of a Charcoal Burner," Shigeyasu Takeno. Based on the original work by Ue Toshikatsu

For a while after that, I spent my days anxiously, but at last came the time I could present my third manuscript. I was now more than fifty years old. One day, an acquaintance recommended a book to me called Sumiyaki Nikki (Diary of a Charcoal Burner) by Toshikatsu Ue, an author residing in Wakayama Prefecture. I said to myself "I want to draw that manga at all costs." As if it were a matter of destiny, the urge to go visit Mr. Ue at his home in Kumano overtook me. He gave me permission to adapt his book into manga and I condensed it into one volume.

Seirindo published Tales of a Charcoal Burner as a single volume. I felt joy and sorrow at the same time. I don't know how to express it clearly, because thinking it over carefully, this brought my dream to a conclusion, a dream which began with my wonderment toward Garo and that continued with my delivering manuscripts to Seirindo. Forty years have now gone by since it all began. I'm truly moved.

Although I don't intend to argue with those who view manga as a product to be used and discarded or as a simple diversion, I think that for manga to take another step toward a new stage, it should become increasingly less mangalike. I hope that there will be more and more manga that people desire to read more than once and that hold a permanent place on their shelves. Even if I'm perhaps the only one who holds this dream.

Finally, I'd like to give my gratitude to Mr. Ue and the editing department of Seirindo for their contribution toward the publication of Sumiyaki Monogatari (Tales of a Charcoal Burner).

August 2005

Glossary of Terms & Notes

Binchō-zumi (14, 52, 61, 231, 237): Also known as binchōtan or white charcoal, binchō-zumi is a high-quality traditional charcoal of Japan. It has a lighter color than black charcoal. It's valued for cooking because it burns hot for a long time, and produces no flames, smoke or unpleasant odors.

The Story of Aoyagi (as "Aoyanagi," 45): A work by Lafcadio Hearn, first published in English, that was based on traditional Japanese texts.

Jikatabi (56, 79-80): Split-toed footwear with rubber soles, typically made from thick fabric and used on the job by construction workers, farmers, and other workmen.

Eburi (58-59, 61, 63, 65, 68): A hoe with a long handle, also used by farmers

Kajika Frog (67): A type of frog that dwells in the rocks along mountain streams in Japan. The mating call of the males was considered lovely, so they've been kept as pets since ancient times.

Himegani (115, 124, 128): A freshwater crab dwelling in the mountain rivers of the main Japanese islands, better known in Japan as "sawagani." It's quite small, with a shell measuring about 2.4 cm wide.

Class B River System (117): In Japan, there are two classes of rivers: river systems deemed important for the national economy and people's lives are designated as "Class A river systems" and administrated by the Minister of Construction. The rest are "Class B" and administrated by the prefectural governors.

Haikonbe (119-121, 131): Better known in Japan as "kawamutsu" (Zacco temmincki/Nipponocypris temminckii or "dark chub"), it belongs to the carp family and is typically 20 cm long. Brownish-gray with a dark blue stripe, but in summer, during its reproductive cycle, it acquires a reddish color.

Sho (185, 195): Japanese unit of measurement used for sake, equivalent to 1.8L

Konnyaku (193): A firm jelly made from the root vegetable of the same name. High in fiber and low in calories, it's used for texture in a variety of Japanese dishes.

Una obra maestra de Osamu Tezuka

Ilustración de Pons, de la [illegible]

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